Weird Tales

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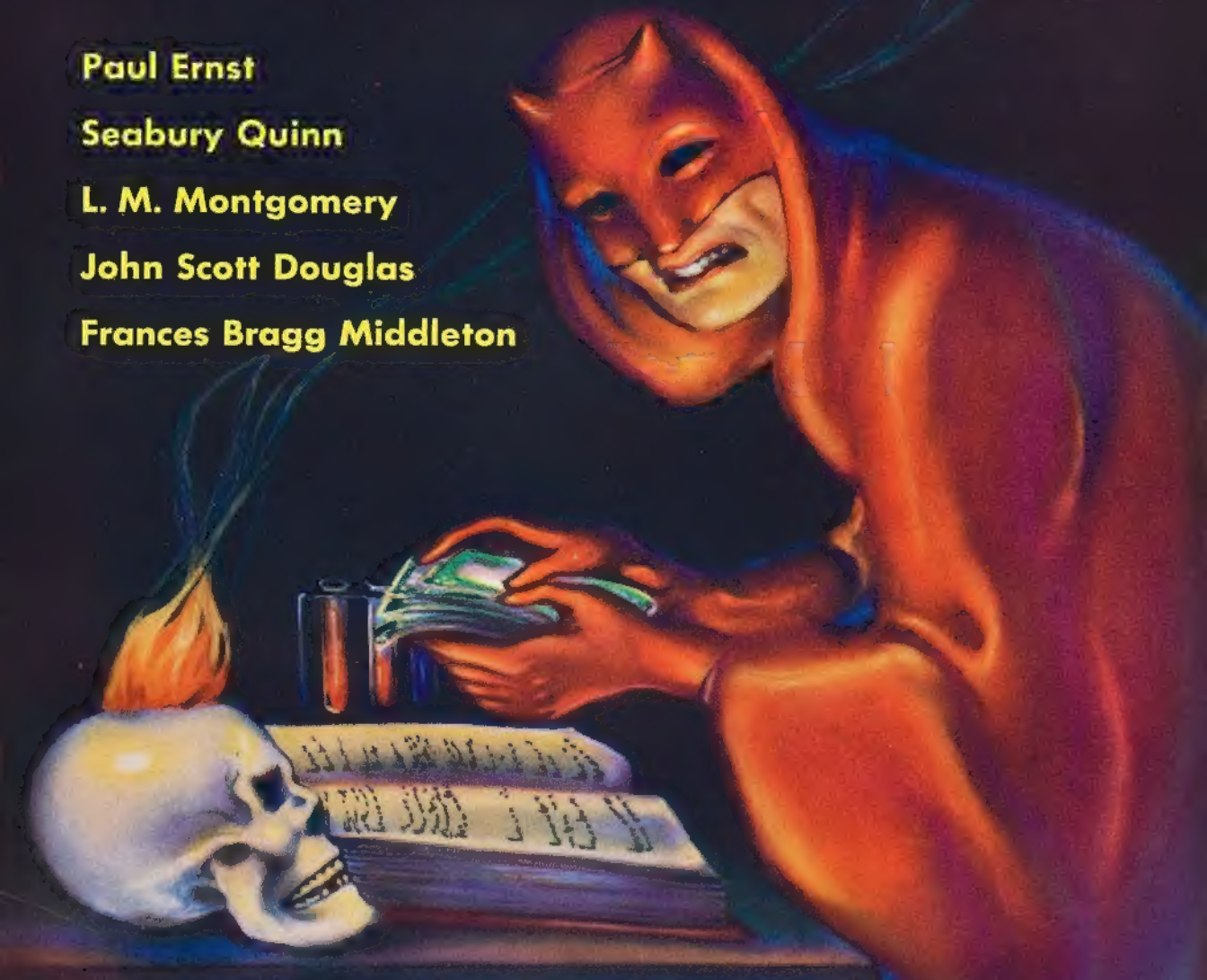
Paul Ernst

Seabury Quinn

L. M. Montgomery

John Scott Douglas

Frances Bragg Middleton



MEET THE SINISTER AND MYSTERIOUS

DOCTOR SATAN

THE WORLD'S WEIRDEST CRIMINAL

A MAGAZINE OF THE BIZARRE AND UNUSUAL

Weird Tales

REGISTERED IN U.S. PATENT OFFICE

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WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

"Welcome, Ascott Keane," came his sardonic words.

Doctor Satan

By PAUL ERNST

The world's weirdest criminal and strangest detective come face to face—a thrilling, fascinating and utterly different mystery-story

1. The Death Shrub

BUSINESS was being done as usual in the big outer office of the Ryan Importing Company. Calls came over the switchboard for various department heads. Men and girls bent over desks, reading and checking order blanks, typewriting, performing the thousand and one duties of big business.

Yet over the office hung a hush, more

sensed than consciously felt. The typewriters seemed to make less than their normal chatter. Employees talked in low tones, when they had something to communicate to one another. The office boy showed a tendency to tiptoe when he carried a fresh batch of mail in from the anteroom.

The girl at the switchboard pulled a plug as a call from the secretary of the big boss, Arthur B. Ryan, was concluded.

The office boy looked inquiringly at her as he passed.

"How's the old man?" he asked her.

The girl shook her head a little.

"I guess he's worse. That last call was important, and he wouldn't take it himself. He had Gladys take it for him."

"What's the matter with him, anyhow?"

"A headache," said the girl.

"Is that all? I thought from the way everybody was acting like this was a morgue, that he was dying or something."

"I guess this is something special in the way of headaches," the switchboard girl retorted, smoothing down the blond locks at the back of her head. "And it came up awful sudden. He walked past here at nine, two hours ago, and grinned at me like he felt great. Then at ten he phoned down to the building drugstore for some aspirin. Now he won't take a call from the head of one of the biggest companies in the city! I guess he feels terrible."

"A headache!" snorted the office boy. "Well, why don't he go see a doctor?"

"I put through a call for Doctor Swanson, on the top floor of the building, ten minutes ago. He was busy with an appointment, but said he'd be down soon."

"A headache!" shrugged the boy again. "And he can't take it! Wonder what he'd do if he got something serious the matter with him?"

He swaggered on, and the hush seemed

● Here is a new type of weird tale, and new thrills await you as you read about the sinister exploits of Doctor Satan, the world's weirdest criminal. He is an immensely wealthy man, who has turned to crime to satisfy his longing for thrills. And he makes crime pay beyond the dreams of avarice; for if it did not pay, the game would not be to his liking. He swims to power with utter disregard for others, striking down those in his path cruelly, ruthlessly, inexorably, and weirdly. He is no ordinary villain, but is truly the Master Mind of crime, possessing scientific knowledge and power that make him unique among all the so-called "master minds" of fiction. He well merits the sobriquet of Doctor Satan. But he is opposed by another mind in many ways equal to his own: Ascott Keane, criminologist par excellence, known even to his intimate friends as only a millionaire playboy. He has turned to tracking down crime for the same reason that Doctor Satan has turned to committing crime—for the thrill of the game. This story is the first of a series of tales, each complete in itself, in which these two strange characters strive against each other. But whether Doctor Satan is preying on rich men in Wall Street, or ruthlessly spreading panic terror in Hollywood, or striking the winter tourist influx at Miami with ghastly death, we know that you will be fascinated with the harrowing adventures of Doctor Satan and Ascott Keane. And each of these stories is a genuine weird tale—eery, uncanny and permeated with an icy breath of horror like a cold breeze from the tomb.

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to deepen over the office. A premonitory hush? Were all in the big room dimly conscious of the sequence of events about to be started there? Later, many claimed they had felt psychic warnings; but whether that is fact or imagination will never be known.

A hush, with a drone of voices and machines accentuating it in the outer office. A silence, in which the doors of the executives, in their cubicles along the east wall of the office space, remained closed. A quiet that seemed to emanate from the blank, shut door marked Arthur B. Ryan, President.

And then the hush was cracked. The silence was torn, like strong linen screaming apart as a great strain rips it from end to end.

From behind the door marked President came a shriek of pain and horror that blanched the cheeks of the office workers. A yell that keened out over the hush and turned busy fingers to wood, and which stopped all words on the suddenly numbed lips that had been uttering them.

Ryan's secretary, pale, trembling, ran from her desk outside the office door and sped into Ryan's office.

"Oh, my God!" the shriek came more clearly to the general office through the opened door. "My head . . . oh, my God!"

And then the screams of the man were swelled suddenly by the high shriek of the girl secretary. "Look—*look*——"

There was the thud of a body in Ryan's office, telling the plain message that she had fainted. And an instant later the agonized shrieks of the man in there were stilled.

For a second all in the general office were gripped by silence, paralyzed, staring with wide eyes at the door to the private office. Then the sales manager stepped to the open door.

A glance he took into Ryan's office. All outside saw his face go the color of ashes. He tottered, caught at the door to keep from falling.

Then, with the air of a man dazed by a physical blow, he closed the door and stumbled toward the switchboard.

"Phone the police," he said hoarsely to the girl. "My God . . . the police . . . though I don't know what they can do. His head——"

"What—what's the matter with his head?" the girl faltered as her fingers stiffly manipulated the switchboard plugs.

The sales manager stared at her without seeing her, his eyes looking as if they probed through her and into unplumbed chasms of horror behind her.

"A tree growing out of his head," he panted. "A tree . . . pushing out of his skull, like a plant cracking a flower-pot it outgrows, and sending roots and branches through the cracks."

He leaned against the switchboard.

"A death-tree, killing him, murdering him. Hurry! Get the——"

He lunged for her, but was too late. The switchboard girl had slid from her chair, unconscious. The screams, the atmosphere of horror, the look of terror on the man's face, had been too much for her.

Blindly, with fingers that rattled against the switchboard, the man put through the call himself.

THAT was at eleven in the morning of July 12th, a day that made criminal history in New York.

At eleven-ten, in a great Long Island home, the second chapter was being written.

The home belonged to Samuel Billingsley, retired merchant. It was a huge estate, high-walled. In the walls a new iron gate glistened, closing off the front driveway. It was a high gate, heavily barred—

the kind of gate that would be installed by a man afraid for his life. Beside that gate two men lounged. Each was big, heavily muscled, with a bulge at his armpit speaking of a gun in readiness.

At the front door of the house another man was stationed; and there was one at the rear, and still another patrolling the grounds. This last one carried a rifle.

The summer sun gleamed bright over the estate. The silence of the suburbs enveloped it, yet danger lowered like a black veil over the place.

A long low roadster slid to a stop before the closed iron gate. A young man, dark-haired, with dark gray eyes, sounded the horn. Reluctantly the gate was opened. The man drove the roadster in and started toward the house, but was stopped by the two guards who stood before the car with an automatic apiece covering its driver.

The young man glared.

"Well?" he snapped. "Who the devil are you? What are you doing here?"

"Same to you, buddy," rasped one of the men, coming closer. "What's your business here?"

The young man glanced at the new, high gate and back to the guards.

"I'm Samuel Billingsley's nephew," he said. "My name's Merton Billingsley, I've been away for a month—and I come back to be stopped at the point of a gun at my own uncle's house——"

"Take it easy," said the man gruffly. "We're the old—I mean we're Mr. Billingsley's bodyguard. Hired us two days ago. Orders were to investigate everybody driving in here. Have you got any proofs that you're his nephew?"

The young man showed letters. His annoyance was giving way to curiosity—and alarm.

"Bodyguard!" he exclaimed. "Why a bodyguard? Is my uncle's life in danger?"

The man shrugged. "I wouldn't know, but I guess it is or he wouldn't have hired us. He didn't tell us anything except to keep everybody out of the grounds."

Merton Billingsley clutched at the man's arm.

"Is he all right now? Have there been any attempts on his life so far?"

"None yet," said the man, holstering his automatic. "And I guess he's all right—except he's got a headache."

"A headache?"

"Yeah. His high-hat butler came down here a half-hour ago, and said a doc had been called and we were to let him through. The old—Mr. Billingsley had a bad headache. The doc came ten minutes ago and is up in his room with him now. But aside from the headache, he's all right——"

Through the golden summer sunlight, like jagged lightning impinging on the ear-drums instead of the optic nerves, a scream lanced out. It was a thin, high shriek that drove the color from the faces of Merton Billingsley and the two guards. It came from behind a shaded window in the front corner of the great house.

"My uncle's room," breathed Merton. "What——"

He swallowed, and jerked his head to the two guards.

"On the running-board," he snapped. "We'll get to the house——"

The whine of gears drowned his words. With a guard on each side, the roadster sped down the graveled driveway and to the house.

The door opened as Merton got to it. A gray-headed butler faced him.

"Willys!" exclaimed Merton. "My uncle . . . what in God's name is the matter with him?"

The man shook his head.

"I don't know. He complained of having a terrific headache, sir. And I phoned for Doctor Smythe. Then, just a minute ago he screamed——"

Down the curved marble staircase to the front hall a man was stumbling—a middle-aged man whose eyes were wide and whose features were distorted.

"Smythe!" said Merton. "Uncle Samuel . . . tell me! Quick!"

The doctor stared at him. He moistened his lips.

"Your uncle is dead."

"Dead! But what happened to him? He was an old man, but he was in good health. What killed him?"

"A plant," whispered the doctor. "A kind of bush. Thorn-bush—God knows what! How awful! That thing, blossoming from his head——"

Merton shook his shoulder savagely.

"Are you insane? Pull yourself together! What's this talk of bushes?"

"A bush . . . growing out of his head!" whispered the doctor, moistening his pale lips again and again.

MERTON started up the stairs. Smythe, rousing himself, grasped his arm.

"Don't go up there, Merton! Don't!"

Merton wrenched his arm away.

"My uncle lies up in his room, dead—and you tell me not to go up to him!"

He took the stairs two at a time.

I'm warning you," came the doctor's shrill voice. "The sight you'll see——"

But Merton went on, around the curve in the staircase, down the hall at the top.

The door to his uncle's room was closed. Impetuously he opened it and leaped inside the big bedroom. It was dim in there, shaded against the sunlight. But after a few seconds he saw it—his uncle's body.

It lay beyond the big bed, the corpse of a man of seventy, thin, clad in a silk robe. The body was twisted and distorted. But it was not the body that riveted the gaze of the dead man's nephew. It was the head.

The head was turned so that, though the body lay on its side, the face was pointed toward the ceiling. And from the top of the skull something was protruding. Merton's hands crept toward his throat as he looked at it.

A sort of bush, with leafless, sharp-pointed twigs branching out in all directions, grew from the top of the skull. It was like a hand with many small sharp fingers that had thrust up through the bone, with its thick, wrist-like stem rooting in the brain beneath.

A tree, quick with life though rooted in death! Quick with life? As Merton stared with glazing eyes, he saw the leafless, sharp little branches crawl out a little farther. *The thing was growing even as he watched it!*

With a low cry, he turned and ran from the room.

2. *Ascott Keane*

IN A Park Avenue penthouse two men were seated in a great room fitted out as a library. The room was lined with books, in sections which were unobtrusively but precisely labeled as sections of shelving in public libraries are labeled. "Science," one of the largest sections, crammed with books, was tagged. Another read, "Mythology;" a third, "Occult." Then there were "Psychology," "Engineering," "Biology," many others, each containing dozens of volumes.

The focal point of the big, lofty chamber was a huge ebony desk. It was at this desk that the two men were seated, one in a leather chair beside it, the other leaning back in a swivel chair from before it.

The man in the visitor's chair was about fifty, expensively dressed, a typical big business man with the suggestion of a paunch that comes with success and a striving after more millions instead of physical fitness. But there was one thing

about this business man that was not typical. That was the expression on his face.

Fear! The blind terror of an incoherent animal caught in a trap beyond its comprehension!

His face was gray with fear. His lips were pallid and his hands were shaking with it. The sound of his ragged breathing was clearly audible in the almost cathedral-like hush of the great library.

The man sitting proprietorially at the desk watched his visitor with almost clinical detachment, though sympathy showed in his deep-set eyes. A man to attract attention in any gathering on earth, this one.

He was a big man, but supple and quick-moving. His eyes, deep under coal-black eyebrows, were light gray; they looked calm as ice, as if no emergency could disturb their steely depths. He had a high-bridged, patrician nose, a long chin that was the embodiment of strength, and a firm, large mouth.

His mouth moved, clipping out words with easy precision.

"You say you got the note yesterday, Walstead?"

Thus casually he addressed Ballard W. Walstead, one of the richest men in the city.

"Yes," said the man in the visitor's chair.

"Why did you come to me with it?"

"Because," said Walstead, raising a trembling hand in a repressed gesture of pleading, "I thought if anyone on earth could save me it would be you. Oh, I know about you, though I realize that not a dozen people in the world are aware of the real life of Ascott Keane. These few know you as one of the greatest criminal investigators that ever lived—a man whose achievements have something almost of black magic in them. They know that you've raised a hobby of criminology into an art that passes beyond the reach of genius."

Ascott Keane's calm, steely eyes stared steadily into the frantic depths of the other man's pale blue ones.

"I am a dilettante," he murmured. "I inherited a fortune, and I loaf through life playing with first editions, polo ponies and big game hunting."

"Yes, yes, I know. That's the picture the world has of you. The picture you've deliberately painted. But I tell you I know your capabilities! You've got to help me, Keane!"

Keane's long, strong hand went out.

"Let me see the note."

Walstead fumbled in his pocket and drew out a folded sheet of paper. Handling it as though it were a deadly serpent, he handed it to Keane, who spread it out on the desk.

"Ballard Walstead," Keane read aloud. "You are hereby given a chance to purchase a continuation of your rather useless life. The price of this continuation is the round sum of one million dollars. You may pay this in any way you please —even in checks, if you like, for if ever you attempt to trace the checks you will die. And if you refuse payment you will die even more quickly.

"You will disregard this as a note from a crank, of course. But by noon tomorrow you will know better. You see, I have given two other men, Arthur B. Ryan and Samuel Billingsley, a choice similar to yours—and I believe they are going to defy me. Read in the afternoon papers what happens to them, Walstead. And believe me when I say that the same thing will happen to you if you do not meet my price. Directions will be given to you tomorrow noon as to where and how you are to pay the money. Your obedient servant, Doctor Satan."

Keane looked up from the paper.

"Doctor Satan," he repeated. Into his

steel-gray eyes came a hard, relentless glint. "Doctor Satan!"

"You know him?" asked Walstead eagerly.

"I know of him. A little. You read in the papers this afternoon of what happened to Ryan and Billingsley?"

"Yes," whimpered Walstead. "My God, yes! And that's what will happen to me, Keane, if you won't help me." He shuddered as though drenched with icy water. "A tree—growing out of a man's head! Killing him! How can such things be done?"

"That is something only Doctor Satan can answer. Did you get instructions about where to pay the money this noon, as is promised in this letter?"

In answer, Walstead drew out another bit of notepaper.

"Walstead:" Keane read. "Leave the money either in thousand-dollar bills or in checks up to twenty thousand dollars apiece, in the trash can at the corner of Broadway and Seventy-Sixth Street, tonight at nine o'clock. If checks, make them payable to Elias P. Hudge. Signed, Doctor Satan."

Keane's eyes searched Walstead's again.

"Are you going to do it?"

"I can't!" exclaimed Walstead hysterically. "I'm a wealthy man, but my affairs are in such a state that to take a million dollars in cash from my business would bankrupt me! I can't!"

KEANE's long, powerful fingers formed a reflective pentroof under his long, powerful chin.

"You're going to defy Doctor Satan, then."

"I must!" cried Walstead. "I have no choice."

Keane's fingers moved restlessly.

"This Doctor Satan must have known your affairs were such that you couldn't meet his order. And he must have foreseen that you would have to refuse his demand. . . . Were you in your office when the second note was delivered?"

"Yes."

"Who delivered it?"

Walstead shivered again.

"That is one of the deepest mysteries of all. No one delivered it."

Keane stared.

"Nobody delivered that note!" Walstead repeated. "I was alone in my office, reading over some papers. I turned away from my desk a moment. When I turned back, the note was there, on top of the other things. No one had come in. The window was closed and locked. Yet the note—was there. It—it was like witchcraft, Keane!"

Keane's fingers, stilled for a moment, moved restlessly again.

"You may be speaking more truly than you know, Walstead. After you received the note, what did you do?"

"I stayed in my office till four-thirty. Then I went down to the building lobby, and saw the afternoon papers. Screaming headlines about the deaths of Ryan and Billingsley. After that I came here as fast as my chauffeur could drive me."

"Did anything unusual happen to you on the way?"

Walstead shook his head.

"Nothing. I got into my car at the office building, was driven straight here, and got out in front of your building."

"No one said anything to you? Or, perhaps, jostled you?"

"No one," said Walstead. Then his lips tightened. "Wait a minute. Yes! A man bumped into me just as I was coming into this building entrance."

Keane's eyes narrowed till all that was apparent of them was two gray glints.

"Can you describe him?" he said quickly.

"No. I didn't pay any attention to him

at all, after I saw he had no weapon in his hand and meant me no harm. His shoulder brushed against my neck and cheek, and then he was gone, after apologizing."

Keane got up from his desk. His eyes were more inscrutable than ever.

"I'll do all I can to help you," he said. "Suppose you run along now, Walstead."

Walstead jerked to his feet with frenzy and perplexity in his face. He was almost as tall as Keane, but didn't give the appearance of being nearly so big.

"I don't understand, Keane. Are you throwing me over? Aren't you going to act with me against this Doctor Satan?"

"Yes, I'm going to act against Doctor Satan." Muscle ridged out in Keane's lean cheeks. "You go along home."

"I'd hoped you would let me stay here, with you, till the danger was past——"

"You will be in no more danger at home than you would be here," replied Keane, with odd gentleness in his tone. "My man will show you to the door."

With the words, Keane's man appeared; a silent, impassive-looking fellow who handed Walstead his hat and stick. Walstead, with many protests, went out. . . .

"BEATRICE," Keane called softly, when he was alone in the big library again.

A section of the shelving, lined with books, swung smoothly away from the wall, forming a doorway. Through it came a girl with a shorthand notebook and a pencil in her tapering hands. She was tall and beautifully formed, with dark blue eyes and hair that was more red than brown.

"You sent him away!" she said, eyes at once accusing and bitterly disappointed. "You wouldn't help him. You sent him away."

"He is past help," retorted Keane. "The stranger that jostled him in front of the building—that stranger was death. Perhaps Doctor Satan himself, perhaps a helper."

"How can you know that?"

Keane breathed deeply.

"Doctor Satan must have known in advance that Walstead could not pay his demands. Hence he must have planned to use him from the start as a sacrifice—a third horrible example of what happens to wealthy men who defy him. The man who jostled him planted death's seeds in him. He will die within the hour, with one of those unearthly shrubs forcing its way up through his skull."

"Still—you sent him away."

"I did, Beatrice. Suppose he died here? The police! Many questions! Detention! And I don't want to be delayed. I have work to do now that makes any of my former tasks seem like unimportant games. Doctor Satan! With three rich men dead, no others will defy him. He'll loot the city—if I can't stop him."

The girl, Beatrice Dale, Keane's companion as well as secretary, fingered the notebook in which was recorded the talk between him and Walstead.

"Who is this Doctor Satan, Ascott?" she said. "I don't seem to remember that he has figured in any of your former work."

"He hasn't. Doctor Satan is a new phenomenon. I've been expecting to hear from him ever since I heard the first whisper of his existence a month ago. Now, with these three weird, fantastic murders, he makes his bow. Who is he? Where does he hide? What does he look like? I don't know—yet."

He began pacing up and down before his big ebony desk.

He chanced to be looking at the chair when it happened.

The chair, also ebony, was pushed a few feet back from the desk. It was tilt-

ed back a bit, with the felt pad slightly awry from the movement of his body as he had left it.

It squatted there, a dark, inanimate thing at one instant. At the next there was a soft *pouff* of sound—and the chair leaped into blue incandescence. Lambent flame played over it, so hot that it blasted the faces of Keane and Beatrice five feet away. For perhaps four seconds the blue flame persisted. Then it died out as suddenly as it had appeared.

And the chair was no longer there. In its place was a little heap of fine ash, smoldering on the carpet.

Keane gazed slowly into Beatrice's horrified eyes.

"I don't know about Doctor Satan yet," he repeated coolly, "but apparently he knows a great deal about me!—Well, what is it, Rice?"

Keane's man stood in the library doorway, staring first at his master and then at the tiny heap of ash that was all that was left of the ebony chair.

"Mr. Walstead just died, sir," he said. "It was in the lobby of the building, just as he was about to step into the street. He's lying down there now." Rice's eyes flashed bleakly. "There's something pushing up through his head, sir. Little sharp spikes of something, like branches of a little tree, or bush."

3. *Doctor Satan*

THREE miles away, in a windowless, black-draped room, a figure bent over a metal table in the attitude of a high priest bending over an altar.

The figure looked like one robed for a costume ball, save that in every line of it was a deadliness that robbed it of all suggestions of anything humorous or social.

Tall and spare, it was covered by a blood-red robe. Red rubber gloves swathed the hands. The face was concealed behind a red mask that curtained it from forehead to chin with only two black eyes, like live coals, showing through eyeholes.

Lucifer! And to complete the grim travesty of resemblance, two horned red projections showed above the red skullcap that hid the man's hair.

Before him, on the metal table, a thin blue flame died slowly down into a sprinkling of yellowish powder from which it had originally been born. The blue flame was the only light in the room. By its flicker could be seen three other men, crouching around the walls and watching the flame with breathless intensity.

One of these three was a young man with an aristocratic but weak and degenerate face. The other two were creatures like gargoyles. The first was legless, with his great, gorilla-like head, set on tremendous shoulders, coming up only to a normal man's waist. The second was a wizened small monkey of a man with bright, cruel eyes peering out from a mat of hair that covered all his features.

The blue flame on the metal table died out. The red-clad figure straightened up. A gloved hand touched a switch and the room was illuminated with red light.

"Ascott Keane," said the man in Satan's costume, "has escaped the blue flame."

The three men around the walls breathed deeply. Then the younger, with the weak face, scowled.

"How do you know that, Doctor Satan?"

"If the flame had consumed him," Doctor Satan said, his voice harsh and monotoned, "the blue fire would have burned red while his body was devoured. It did not burn red."

The younger man walked toward the table. He moved with a curious air of cringing defiance. The other two men

were frankly in awe of the red-clad one. The younger man tried to throw off that awe.

"How do you control the flame, Doctor Satan?" he asked.

The coal-black eyes burned into his through the eyeholes in the red mask.

"It is all in here," Doctor Satan said at last, pointing to an ancient roll of papyrus spread flat on a stand near the metal table. "The ingredients of the flame were compounded first in Egypt, five thousand years ago. To these ingredients are added powdered bits of the person of the one to be consumed by the flame. Fnger-nail parings, hair, bits of discarded clothing, for instance. Then when the powder is burned, the person burns, though a thousand miles of distance separate him from the blue fire."

"Yet Keane escaped," said the young man, watching Doctor Satan narrowly.

"I had no bits of Keane's person to place with the chemicals. He is too shrewd to have allowed hair or nail clippings to be smuggled from his home. I had only a sliver of the chair in which he customarily sits. Obviously he wasn't in the chair when I touched off the fire, and so escaped death."

The young man lit a cigarette. The frightened defiance of his every gesture was heightened by the manner in which he lit it. The coal-black eyes showing through the eyeholes narrowed a little.

"The death tree, Doctor Satan," the young man said. "How do you work that?"

"It is a species of Australian thorn-bush," Doctor Satan said without hesitation. "Rather, it was, till with a certain botanical skill I altered it into a thing that flowers in two hours or less, rooting in a man's brain. The only drawback is that the seed, a tiny thing that floats in air, must be inhaled by the victim, to lodge in the nasal passage and later work its way up to the brain."

"You have more seeds of this tree?" said the young man, fingers shaking as he raised the cigarette to his lips.

"Yes," said Doctor Satan. His manner was strange, his voice almost gentle. But there was a deadliness in the very gentleness, like the deadliness with which a cat toys with a mouse. The monkey-like little man with the hairy face, and the legless giant with the huge shoulders, stirred restlessly in their positions by the wall.

"Why didn't you use the flame on Ryan and Walstead and Billingsley?" questioned the young man. "That would have been easier than killing them with your devilish thorn-bush."

"Easier," conceded the grim figure in red, "but not quite so spectacular. I wanted those three to die as fantastically as possible, so the requests I make on other rich men will be more quickly granted."

A chuckle sounded from the lips under the red mask. Doctor Satan walked to the stand on which the papyrus rested. He pulled out a drawer and took from it ten bundles of currency. In each bundle were thousand-dollar bills. And the band around each bundle proclaimed that each contained a hundred such bills.

"The first contribution," Doctor Satan said. "From William H. Sterling, the philanthropic manufacturer of automobiles. One million dollars."

The young man stared at the heap of currency with glistening eyes. A fortune, in such small compass that it could be concealed under a man's clothes!

But now, at the same time, he seemed suddenly to sense the mockery of Doctor Satan's geniality, and of his apparent frankness in disclosing his affairs. Color drained from his face. And more drained

from it at Doctor Satan's next words.

"You know a great deal about me, don't you, Monroe?"

Monroe swallowed painfully, then straightened his shoulders in his former frightened defiance.

"Yes," he said, a bit too loudly. "I know a lot. I know your real name—a family name familiar to everyone in the United States. I know your philosophy of life: how you, an enormously wealthy man, tired of all the thrills that money can buy, have turned to crime. I know you as a cold-blooded monster who, under the masquerade of Doctor Satan, intends to make your crimes pay as part of your lawless game. I know how you have studied the occult and the scientific, in preparation for this debut. And now I know how you control two of your murder tools—the blue flame and the tree of death."

Doctor Satan's eyes bored into Monroe's till the younger man gripped the edge of the metal table for support.

"Yes, you know a lot, Monroe," he almost crooned. "More than anyone else living. You wouldn't think of betraying me, would you?"

"Not if you treat me fairly, Doctor Satan," faltered Monroe. "But if you try to double-cross me, you are lost. In a safe deposit box which is to be opened by my lawyer in case an 'accident' happens to me there is a full account of yourself——"

His voice trailed off into a frightened squeak at the look in Doctor Satan's coal-black eyes. The red-clad figure appeared to loom taller and taller, till it almost filled the room. And now all the defiance was gone from Monroe's posture, leaving only the fright.

"What are you—going to do?" he panted. "What——"

Again his voice trailed off. But this time it ended in a thickness like that of beginning sleep.

Doctor Satan's eyes, glittering, ruthless, held Monroe's eyes. Doctor Satan's hand passed slowly before Monroe's face. The monkey-like man and the legless giant watched from the wall.

"You are asleep." Doctor Satan's voice sounded somnolently in the silent, windowless room.

"I am asleep," breathed Monroe, wide, glassy eyes fixed on the red mask.

"You will tell me all you know and all you hope to do."

"I will tell you all I know and all I hope to do."

"What were your plans concerning me?"

For a second Monroe's still features twisted, as though even in hypnosis his will fought to avoid answering that question. Then his lips moved mechanically.

"I was going to inform the police how to find you when you collected your next looted million. Then I was going to take the money you got from Sterling, and the seeds of the death tree and the chemicals for the blue flame, and collect more money myself."

"It is enough," said Doctor Satan, still in that almost gentle voice.

The monkey-like man and the legless giant looked at each other. Doctor Satan had pronounced a death sentence.

Doctor Satan spoke to them, eyes never leaving Monroe's face.

"Girse. Bostiff."

The two moved toward Monroe. The monkey-like man known as Girse hopped like a deformed ape. Bostiff hitched his giant torso over the floor with his thick arms, using his calloused knuckles as feet.

"The iron box, Bostiff."

Bostiff hitched his way to one wall, pushed back the sable drapes and drew

from a three-foot niche a coffin-like box that gleamed dully in the red light.

Doctor Satan's hand went out. He plucked three hairs from Monroe's blond head. He laid the hairs on a small pile of the yellowish powder on the metal table.

"You will lie down in the box, Monroe," he droned.

The blond young man walked with jerky steps to the metal coffin and lay down in it.

"The lid, Bostiff."

Picking up the massive iron cover of the coffin as easily as though it were a pot lid, the legless giant put it on the box. Then, without further orders, he dragged the metal coffin back to its niche in the wall and slid it home in the surrounding stonework.

Doctor Satan picked up a pinch of the yellowish powder and crumbled it sharply in his fingers. The tiny heap on the table burst into blue flame. The three blond hairs writhed and were consumed. . . .

The end of the metal coffin, showing from the niche, was suddenly red-hot, then glowing with white incandescence. Slowly it faded to deep, hot red in color, and back to black.

Girse and Bostiff watched stolidly. If ever an investigator opened that box nothing would be found but a pinch of ashes. A pinch of ashes that had been a man, planning to betray the master.

Doctor Satan's voice sounded, harshly, calmly.

"Danger has been eliminated from within. Now no one on earth knows my real identity. It remains only to eliminate danger from without."

Bostiff spoke, his dull eyes fixed on Doctor Satan's mask.

"The danger from without, master?"

Doctor Satan's eyes glowed green.

"Yes. The danger that lies in Ascott Keane." The name crackled out in the still room. "There is the only danger I recognize. The police? Ludicrous! Private detectives? Bodyguards hired by wealthy victims? They are children! But in Ascott Keane lies a threat."

The red-gloved hand touched the light switch. Slowly the red bulbs faded out, bathing the room in a lowering darkness like that of a lurid, rapid sunset.

"But the threat of Ascott Keane is to be removed at once. Walstead saw him. Walstead showed him the note. Keane will act on that knowledge—and with that action he will be trapped."

Pure darkness held the windowless room. In the darkness Doctor Satan's voice concluded.

"Ascott Keane shall die."

Then there was silence, broken only by the sound of breathing. The breathing of two men: Girse and Bostiff.

Doctor Satan was gone.

4. *Satan's Trap*

IN FRONT of a triple mirror before which was a bench holding hundreds of tiny pots and jars, Ascott Keane worked deftly. His fingers flew from jar to features, pot to face. And as they flew his face subtly altered. Already it was no longer the face of Keane. It was a countenance which to Beatrice Dale was vaguely familiar—though she could not yet name it.

"That hideous death shrub!" she said. "I can't yet see how it is used by Doctor Satan."

"You've seen Indian fakirs make a tree grow in a pot, haven't you?" said Keane. "Usually it's a miniature orange tree. They make it grow before your eyes, and pick an orange from it. Well, Doctor Satan's wizardry is something like that; only he utilizes a form of thorn-bush that flowers in human substance instead of earth."

He reshaped his lips with a collodeon-like red lacquer, and the girl cried aloud. Keane's face was that of Walstead. Line for line it was Walstead's slightly puffy countenance that was reflected in the mirror. A close friend of the dead millionaire would have been deceived.

"What are you planning to do, Ascott?" asked Beatrice.

Keane began pinning thin pads to the lining of his coat to give his lean strong body the bulk of Walstead's puffy body.

"Doctor Satan said in his note to Walstead to put the money in a trash can at Broadway and Seventy-Sixth Street. Very well, I'm going to take Walstead's place. Made up as him, I'll drop a package in that can—and wait to see who picks it up."

Beatrice shook her beautiful, coppery brown head.

"Walstead's death isn't out in the papers yet. But surely Doctor Satan must know that the man is dead. Or are you hoping to fool him?"

"Doctor Satan," said Keane dryly, "hardly has to wait to get his information from the newspapers."

"Then he'll know that the man who looks like Walstead, and who drops the package in the trash can, can't possibly *be* Walstead."

"That's right," said Keane, drawing on the padded coat and scrutinizing himself in the triple mirrors.

"But he'll guess it's you! And he'll almost certainly try to kill you!"

"That's what I'm hoping," said Keane, putting on a hat of the type worn by Walstead.

"But Ascott——"

"It's like this," said Keane. "Doctor Satan hasn't met me yet. I think he'll underestimate me. So I am rather stupidly disguising myself as Walstead and going to the place where Walstead was to have gone, in the hope that Doctor Satan will trap me. In that event"—his jaw squared—"I think he'll be sorry."

He stepped away from the mirrors. And it was not Keane who moved—it was Walstead!

In an antique Italian cabinet there was an extra wide drawer. Keane pulled this out. In it was a rolled papyrus that closely resembled the papyrus that had been spread wide in Doctor Satan's black room. Beside the papyrus was a little stone jar.

Keane opened the jar and took from it a bit of greenish paste, which he touched to his forehead, the soles of his shoes, and the palms of his hands.

"Marvelous beings, the ancient Egyptians," he said softly. "I recognized the blue fire that burned my chair—and would have consumed me if I'd been in it. The fire burned in many a temple along the Nile. But what the Egyptian wizards concocted they usually made fruitless by further research."

Beatrice caught his arm, her eyes fearful.

Keane pressed her hand. "Don't worry about me, my dear. I'll be back soon, and I think I'll be back with news that this Doctor Satan, new peril to a city as yet ignorant of his existence, has passed on to the hell he should have been sent to long ago."

He walked to the door, moving as Walstead had moved. His eyes met the girl's deep blue ones. Then he was gone, to be trapped by the creature who had brought to a new science of criminology all the knowledge of ancient magic and modern research.

NINE o'clock!

Upper Broadway was crowded with night shoppers and movie-goers. Among the crowds near Seventy-Sixth Street moved a tall, slightly paunchy man who kept his face shadowed by the brim of his hat, a face that many in the city

would have sworn was that of a ghost—of the dead Walstead.

On the northeast corner of Broadway and Seventy-Sixth a trash can showed. The man disguised as Walstead crossed to the can.

Under his arm was a small parcel done up in newspaper. He dropped the parcel in the can, and walked on. Without a backward glance he rounded the next corner.

But once around the corner, Keane stopped and went back, moving like a shadow.

He peered through the double angle of a corner plate-glass window at the trash can. And he saw a sinister miracle.

The can was of wire, with interstices in its walls through which the contents could be seen. When Keane had tossed the package into it, the can had been half full of refuse. Now the old papers and odds and ends of trash seemed to be melting away, like water draining down through a hole. Lower and lower the contents sank—till finally the can was empty!

Keane shook his head a little, eyes gleaming like ice.

"Transmission of substance through empty air!" he breathed. "One of the secrets of nature no man is supposed to have unlocked! You're a terrible adversary, Doctor Satan!"

None in the crowds so close to the can had noted the way the refuse slowly disappeared from within it. But Keane had caught it all. Moreover, he had seen that the trash had disappeared first from the north side of the can, as though it were flowing in that direction, melting into thin air as it flowed.

The north side of the can. Toward him.

Keane slunk into a doorway. His quick eyes roved over the Broadway crowd. And in a moment they rested on a figure that tensed his body as a hound's body is tensed at the scent of a fox.

A tall, shambling man, across the street from the trash container, was walking slowly toward the Seventy-Second Street subway entrance. Under his arm was held a parcel done up in newspaper.

Keane's lips thinned. Doctor Satan was making sure he saw the parcel and followed the carrier!

He stepped unobtrusively from the doorway and into the Broadway crowds, where he followed the tall, shambling figure to the subway entrance. Was the tall figure that of Doctor Satan himself? Or was it one of his helpers? Keane did not know. But he did know that he would have shot the man down in cold blood, on the chance that a diabolical career would have been nipped in the bud, had he not been fully aware that no weapon as crude as an automatic could prevail over an opponent like Doctor Satan.

THE tall figure got off the subway at a Greenwich Village station. Keane followed, a block behind.

His body was taut as a stretched tendon. He knew he was to be trapped, to be brought to a carefully devised death. He knew that Doctor Satan had, for the moment, dropped all other plans to concentrate on removing him so that he could follow his criminal career unhampered.

Could he stay unharmed in that trap till he had overcome the man? Was his intellect the equal of that which could cause solid matter to dissolve and reappear in another spot?

He was prepared for violence as he walked along the dark Village street after the tall figure. He was ready for anything from a bullet or knife in the dark to an attack and abduction by masked men springing on him from dark area-

ways. But he was not prepared for the thing that actually did happen.

At one moment he was following the tall figure. At the next the figure ahead had disappeared—and Keane was still moving forward, though he had willed his body to halt while he gazed around to see where the figure could have gone to! Moving forward, against his will, against the conscious command of his brain!

Keane strove to stop, to walk to right or left. He could not. His muscles were driven by another's will.

And now another thing happened—a thing even more frightening. He began to lost his sight.

The dark street, the partly lighted buildings lining it, the sidewalk before him, all slowly faded from his sight. But his body kept moving slowly, surely forward.

In a moment he was blind. He could see not one thing. But his feet seemed able to see. They bore him on without a stumble, raising for curbs, lowering him for gutters.

Thus with no man forcing him, apparently, blindfolded as surely as if thick cloths were tied over his eyes, Keane moved to the will of Doctor Satan, toward the trap.

He felt himself turn. Under his hand was an iron railing. He felt himself going down steps. A door creaked open in front of him. He walked on, totally blind, and heard the soft creak, and a slam, behind him.

More stairs downward. Hands outstretched to scrape along the moist walls of a passage like a low tunnel. Steps again. A clang over his head as though a stone trap-door had been battened down above him. Finally a swish of drapes, and a harsh, monotoned voice that made every nerve-end in his body twitch.

No need to speculate on the ownership of that voice! Its vibrant arrogance and deadly coldness told him. It was the voice of Doctor Satan himself. And he was in the grim masquerader's hidden headquarters.

5. The Two Titans

SLOWLY Keane's eyesight returned to him, to telegraph to his mind weird, nightmare pictures.

Black-draped walls closed him in. Lounging against one wall were two men —a man with a giant's torso and no legs, and a creature with a hairy, ape-like face in which were set bright, cruel little eyes.

Across from them was a metal brazier, set on a high tripod, in which a small flame flickered. In the center of the room was a metal table, bare save for a small pinch of yellowish powder. And over this table was bending the man who had spoken—a figure that set the blood to leaping in Keane's veins as his heart thudded with sudden acceleration in his breast. A tall figure robed in red, with a red mask over the face, red gloves on the hands, and a red skull-cap from which protruded small mocking imitations of Satan's horns.

Doctor Satan turned from the metal table. His black eyes burned at Keane through the eyeholes of the red mask. The mask quivered a little as the lips behind it moved.

"Welcome, Ascott Keane," came sardonic words. "We are honored that you should have gone to such trouble to visit us in our modest lair."

Keane's face, looking, in the red glare that illuminated the room, like something cast in bronze, remained impassive. Wordlessly he watched the diabolical figure in red.

The mockery faded from Doctor Satan's voice. His harsh tone was edged with steel as he said:

"You committed suicide when you re-

solved a month ago to devote your life to destroying me. Oh, yes, I knew of the resolve the instant it was made. I have ways of knowing what is in men's minds; though I concede that you were able, shortly after that, to shield your brain from me. Tell me, Ascott Keane, what warned you of my existence?"

Keane stood straight and tall before the red-robed figure. His resemblance to Walstead faded, in spite of make-up, with the altering of his expression. He was Keane again, regardless of collodeon-painted lips and padded clothes.

"A month ago," he said, "I talked with the son of a bankrupt friend of mine. The boy, a wild and not very strong character, said nothing significant. But I too can read a little of what is in men's minds. And in his I caught a glimpse of a figure in Satan's red masquerade. I got a hint of the man's background and motives: a rich man, still young, jaded with purchased thrills, with no more humanity in his heart than a snake—out to become the world's leading criminal. A man whose whimsical choice of a name, Doctor Satan, could not have been more apt in expressing the ruthlessness of his purpose. A sleek beast, playing a monstrous game. A thing to be stamped out as soon as possible."

The black eyes gleamed through the satanic mask.

"Young Monroe, you are talking about. Fortunately he did not know my identity at that time. And now no one will ever know. Monroe is no longer in a position to talk. And some papers he left behind with his lawyer have been destroyed within the hour."

Again the arrogant voice hardened.

"So you decided to be the one to annihilate me. Noble Keane! But the roles will be reversed. It is you who will be annihilated. I marked you at the start as a man to be killed. Wealthy yourself, with a fairly analytical mind, you have entertained yourself for years by scotching crime. But your career ends, with me, Keane. It ends now, in this room."

Girse and Bostiff slowly left the wall they had been lounging against. Girse came with quick, small steps to Keane's left side. Bostiff hitched his great body, with swinging movements of his huge arms, to Keane's right side.

Keane still stayed motionless. Futile to attempt to overpower Doctor Satan physically: it could not have been done even had the gigantic Bostiff and the agile Girse not been there in the black-walled room.

The walls of the trap he had entered were strong walls; and its teeth were sharp teeth, from which there seemed no escape. But Keane's gray eyes were stedfast on the masked face of Doctor Satan and there was no weakening of resolution in the square line of his jaw.

Doctor Satan repeated an order he had given once before on that day.

"Bostiff," he said softly, "the iron box."

The legless giant hitched his way to the wall, drew back a sable drape, and pulled from the niche in the stonework the coffin-like metal box.

Doctor Satan stared at Keane with green-glinting eyes. The stare held, minute after minute. Keane's eyes slowly glazed.

"You are asleep," droned Doctor Satan at length.

"I am asleep," breathed Keane.

Girse and Bostiff stared at each other with savage expectance on their faces.

"You will do whatever I command," Doctor Satan said.

"I will do whatever you command," said Keane, like an automaton.

DOCTOR SATAN'S red-gloved hand went out toward Keane's head. He plucked three hairs and laid them over the small mound of yellowish powder on the table. Act for act, he was duplicating the scene in which a treacherous disciple had been reduced from a man to a pinch of ashes.

"Take the lid from the box, Bostiff."

The legless giant lifted the iron cover from the coffin. Within it could be seen scattered fine ash.

"Keane, lie down in the box."

The black eyes gleamed with a feral light as Ascott Keane slowly walked to the box and lowered his body into it. Keane lay there, gazing up with wide, glazed eyes.

Bostiff placed the lid back on the box.

His dull eyes went from the box to the niche in the wall.

"No," Doctor Satan answered his unspoken question, "we'll not put the box in its crypt. Leave it where it is. I want to watch this."

The red-gloved hands clenched with eloquent triumph and revenge. The red-robed figure towered in the room. Then Doctor Satan turned to the metal table.

He picked up a bit of the yellowish powder and crumbled it between powerful fingers. The tiny heap on the table burst into clear blue flame.

The eyes of Doctor Satan and his two servants turned toward the metal box in which lay Keane.

Swiftly the box glowed dull red, cherry red, white-hot. Its rays beat against the faces of the three, set the sable drapes to billowing a little.

And in that white-hot metal coffin a thing of flesh and blood was lying—or had been lying when the blue flame began to burn.

The metal box lost its fierce white glow. The heat rays beating from it faded in intensity. Doctor Satan's red robe stirred with the deep breath he drew.

"And so ends Ascott Keane," he said vibrantly. "The one obstacle in my path. I can be a king, an emperor, now, in time."

He turned to Girse and Bostiff.

"Go. I have no more need of you."

Bostiff hitched his huge body silently toward an end wall. He drew aside a drape and opened a door. Girse followed him out of it.

ALONE, Doctor Satan went to the cabinet and drew from a drawer the ten bundles of currency containing one hundred thousand-dollar bills apiece. The bundles disappeared beneath the red robe. His hand went toward the switch that controlled the red illumination of the room.

But his finger did not touch the switch. His hand remained suspended in the air, while he watched the iron coffin. And his red-robed body was as immobile as that of a statue.

The lid of the coffin was moving.

Slowly, steadily, it raised, to slide from the box and clang against the floor.

A hand and arm appeared above the edge of the box, which was still black-hot. The hand was unharmed. The coat sleeve above it was charred a little at the cuff; that was all.

Another hand and arm appeared, and then the body of Ascott Keane from the waist up as he sat in the coffin.

Silently, rigidly, Doctor Satan glared at him. And Keane got out of the coffin and stood beside it. Wisps of smoke rose here and there from singed garments. But his flesh was not even reddened by the fierce fire, and his gray eyes bored steadily at the black eyes behind the mask.

"What the Egyptians discovered," he said softly, "they rendered fruitless by succeeding discoveries. I read the origin

of your blue flame in your first attempt on my life, Doctor Satan. And I took the precaution of using as armor some of the green paste the old priests used against the consuming fires of their enemies."

He took two slow steps toward the red-clad figure.

"You should have watched your flame, instead of the iron coffin, Doctor Satan. You would have seen then that the flame burned blue throughout. And it should have burned red if my body was devoured."

The breathing of the red-masked man sounded in the tense hush of the room. His eyes, glaring at the man who had escaped a fate that would have overwhelmed any other mortal on earth, were frightful.

"Now we are alone, Doctor Satan. You have considerately sent your men away, as I hoped you would do. We'll see if your powers are as strong as you think they are."

The glare faded from Doctor Satan's eyes, leaving them glacially cold.

"I'll not underestimate you a second time, Ascott Keane! The death shrub—the blue flame—you are armed against those. But I have other weapons."

"You'll never use them," Keane growled deep in his throat.

And then his hand shot up.

Around Doctor Satan's red-robed body a softly glowing aura suddenly formed. It was like a ball of pale yellow light which enclosed him, a lambent shell against the red rays of the room's illumination.

A snarl came from Doctor Satan's lips, sounding muffled, as though the lambent shell had actual substance and could stifle sound. He straightened, with the aura moving as his body moved.

His hands moved, weaving strange designs in the yellowed air. And slowly the aura faded a little from around him.

Tendons ridged up on the back of Keane's outstretched hand. Perspiration studded his forehead with the intensity of his effort to overwhelm the figure in red.

That aura which he had flung around the red-robed body was one of the most powerful weapons known to occultism: a concentration of the pure form of electricity known as the Life Force. Mantling a living thing as it mantled Doctor Satan, it should drain out life, leaving behind nothing but inanimate clay. Yet it was not harming this man!

SLOWLY, relentlessly, the aura continued to fade. And then Doctor Satan's hands rose and leveled toward Keane.

Strange duel between two titans—two men who probably knew more of Nature's dark secrets than any others on earth. Odd battle, with Keane, the force of morality, gradually being beaten down by the force of evil.

For now Keane's rigid arm was sinking as the yellow aura almost disappeared from around Doctor Satan. Slowly he sank to his knees, as if a great weight oppressed him. And, as though this great weight was that of some intangible sea which could suffocate as well as weigh down, he began to gasp for breath. Louder and louder his agonized breathing sounded in the room. Doctor Satan's black eyes glowed with triumph.

Keane could see nothing—could feel nothing. Yet it was as if some colorless, invisible, tremendously heavy jelly were gradually hardening around him.

The red lights grew dimmer, though Doctor Satan had not touched the switch. Keane felt that he was almost lost.

With enormous effort he brought his arms up, spreading them wide at his sides.

"Mother of God!" he whispered.

Like a living cross he was, in that position; with trunk and head the upright, and arms the horizontal bars.

"Mother of God!"

Doctor Satan's snarl was that of a beast. His eyes took on their feral green light, with a fiendish disappointment embittering their depths.

And the great, invisible sea that was beating Keane down gradually receded from around him. But as it receded, so dimmed the red lights, till the two men were in blackness.

"This time you preserve your life," Doctor Satan grated in the darkness. "Next time—you leave your life behind!"

There was a thud of sound, like a soft explosion.

"Next time," began Keane, struggling to his feet and forcing his body forward through the last traces of the deadly, unseen sea.

He stopped. He was alone in the black-walled room.

Slowly the lights came up again, as though shining ever more clearly through a psychic, thinning fog. Keane began wrenching the black drapes from the walls.

He found a door and opened it. Ahead of him he saw a low passage with steps at the end.

He ran down the passage, up the steps. In a moment he was in the street, clutching the iron railing he had felt when he came here blinded.

Cursing softly, he looked up and down the sidewalk. There was, of course, no sign of the red-clad figure.

"Defeat," he groaned.

Doctor Satan had made good his escape. And with him had gone one million dollars, fruit of his first fantastic crime.

"Defeat!"

Keane's wide shoulders sagged, but only for a moment. Then they straightened.

The first round was Doctor Satan's. But there would be another time. And then, knowing a little more of the manner of being he was pitted against, he could fight more effectively—and win.

Another startling encounter between Ascott Keane and Doctor Satan will be published next month. Order your copy at your news dealer's now.

"One by one the corpses were released from their bondage."

The Drome of the Living Dead

By JOHN SCOTT DOUGLAS

What horrible compulsion led the aviators of the Whirlwind Flight to fire on their comrades? An exciting tale of the World War

MAJOR HUGH MILLER, wiry little Commanding Officer of the 1st Air Squadron, glanced up as his big, blond orderly entered his office. Hope struggled with despair in Miller's haggard gray eyes.

"Is that one of Cameron's flight?" he asked hoarsely.

Lieutenant Clinton Creel's thin lips twitched with a faint smile.

"No, sir," he answered crisply. "Just a plane being ferried here from the rear."

Miller glanced at his wrist-watch for the eighth time in an hour.

"Ten or fifteen minutes more petrol in their planes if they're still alive, Creel." The C. O. ran a shaking hand through his iron-gray hair. "It's driving me crazy! Ten men gone in two weeks—vanished completely. Where, Creel—*where?*"

Creel shrugged. "The breaks of war, sir!"

Miller sprang to his feet, his face twitching. "Breaks of war, nothing!" he cried. "It's——" His bony hand made a trembling, helpless gesture as he groped for words; words which would express the fear that had been crawling in his brain like maggots for the past two weeks.

The little officer began to pace back and forth, speaking in a voice husky with emotion:

"There's a spy in our midst, that's evident, Creel. Someone's tampered with our beacon light each time a patrol returned after dark. But—how? I've placed guards around the switch; still it goes off. No one can find anything wrong afterward.

"The flights which should land here continue westward, unable to find this drome. Where do they go? If they cracked up, we'd get reports. If they landed at other dromes, they'd return. But ten planes we know of have flown westward in the last two weeks—never to return.

"No wonder the men are going screwy from the strain. They try to hide their fear. But it's there, all the time, preying on their minds. . . . And what of that 'Whirlwind Flight'? It swoops down, killing our men right and left. It's not a flight composed of flesh-and-blood men—it's composed of devils, of machines, of robots. The Frogs claim it flies westward, too—not eastward toward the German lines. They claim there are repainted D. H's. in that flight; that it is flown by the phantom pilots of Yanks who died."

The C. O. broke off short, beads of perspiration standing out on his gray forehead. "They're crazy, of course — quite crazy——"

Shuddering as though in the grip of malaria, the little major began pacing behind his desk. Once more he glanced with glassy eyes at his watch, shook it, looked again. Then he pulled the blind back an inch from the window. Nothing but darkness, broken momentarily by a star shell dripping its tentacles of light down the sky. No sign of flashing exhaust stacks; no sound of droning props through the crashing, shrieking noises filling the night.

A blue-flame seemed to burn in the orderly's light blue eyes.

"You're taking this too hard, sir."

"Too hard!" The C. O. wheeled, eyes twitching with anger. "What would you have me do, Creel?" Miller's voice wasn't quite steady. "Laugh and shrug when I don't know what kind of hell I'm sending those kids out to when I order them to fly? Every time I send 'em out, I wonder if I'll ever see them again. By night they vanish to the westward; by day, that damned Whirlwind Flight attacks like hell on wings!

"I'm not like you, Creel. I'm with those fledglings every minute they're flying. You don't feel anything. You have no nerves, no heart—you're like those demons in that Whirlwind Flight, you're a machine!"

Creel's thin lips tightened. "I don't let my imagination——"

"Imagination!" Miller snorted. "You have none!" Suddenly the wiry little major's body stiffened. "Motors, Creel!

Cameron's flight——" He turned, eyes unnaturally bright. "The beacons are ready?"

"We examined them before dusk, sir."

"Yes, yes; I remember. And that ferried plane came in——"

THE C. O. brushed past Creel, hurrying down the narrow corridor of the barracks toward the door. There he froze. Not a flight; just a single motor! The others had died? Something tightened in the major's throat. If that single pilot, Russ Cameron, had discovered that hidden airdrome from which the Whirlwind Flight came, the loss of two men was worth while. Tomorrow the bombers could flatten it. So ran his thoughts.

He sensed rather than saw men at "archie" posts, ready to fire the anti-aircraft guns. Other men stood at the beacons, ready to place fingers of light on the plane to identify its insignia.

The droning was deafening, now, clapping sharply against barracks and hangars. The C. O. could see the sputtering, bluish-white flashes of its exhaust stacks.

"Lights!" he barked hoarsely.

From the darkness came grunts and curses.

Swearing like a madman, the C. O. ran toward one crew.

"Lights, you fools!" he bellowed. "They must work! Not five minutes ago——"

"That was five minutes ago, sir," a mechanic interrupted.

A cold sensation gripped the little major's heart. Strength seemed to flow out of his body. Above was a plane, flying westward to what? Death, destruction? Here on the ground they were powerless to direct its course, yet the C. O. felt certain it was one of his planes. Once more some mysterious hand had blotted out their beacons.

Suddenly Miller saw red. "For God's sake, get lights! Anything! Matches, searchlights! We have to let that fellow know where his drome is; he hasn't over seven minutes' fuel in his crate——"

Men were only too eager to assist their comrade. Pilots came running out of the hangars with searchlights. Others struck matches.

There was a long, drawn-out *vooooooo* of a speeding projectile—then a blinding blaze of light. Blackness was blasted away. For a number of seconds, the major could see nothing. When he could distinguish objects again, the sputtering exhaust stacks showed him that the plane was far to the westward, flying a straight course. The shell had exploded at the moment when the pilot might have seen their myriad small lights; that moment had passed.

The major walked back to his office with bowed shoulders and numb brain. He felt as if the 71st were in the skeins of some intangible mystery. Russ Cameron meant more to Miller than any other member of the squadron. In sending him out to solve the mystery which had been cracking morale, he had played his last ace—and it had been trumped. The little major felt dead inside, utterly beaten.

LIEUTENANT Russ Cameron had been blinded by that exploding shell. Flying five thousand feet above earth, he had peered downward while the blue light quivered in a macabre world. A weird, unrecognizable world it was. Before his eyes could adjust focus, earth and sky were again drenched in blackness.

His daredevil blue eyes shadowed as he glanced at his petrol gage. Almost empty! A few minutes more, and he'd be groping blindly in the darkness for a landing—groping as Nevin, Crabbe, Rockwell, Towne, Brawley and others of the 71st had groped before him.

A weird foreboding chilled Russ Cam-

eron's heart. In a few minutes, perhaps, he would learn how they had completely vanished from the face of the earth. Ten companions had vanished—where?

Death was understandable. The two friends who had left the 71st with Russ had died as brave men die. They had met a bombing squadron. Russ had accounted for two Fokkers; his two friends, for one Fokker each before they had died from machine-gun lead. But you understood that!

Disappearing like the ten men who had flown westward over the 71st's drome, however, leaving no wreckage, no charred remains, nothing—that was what gnawed at a man's reason, undermined his belief in his own sanity. Russ shifted his big, rough-hewn body uneasily in his pit. And would he, too, vanish like that when his petrol gave out?

Suddenly a beam of light fingered the sky. Relief surged over Russ. He had not passed the 71st—he was not lost!

The light struck his plane, blindingly. Russ could see nothing below, but he kicked left rudder, pushed his stick forward, and went into a spin. Another light shattered the blackness.

Russ's confidence returned. Right where the beacons were located at the 71st! His drome, all right.

The lights followed him down. Doubt suddenly crept into Russ's mind. What if this wasn't his drome? What if the lights had refused to work again? The C. O. had promised that Creel would place them under guard, of course . . . but there were those vanished men!

Russ snapped his stick backward, sharply. Mingled suspicion and fear made his backbone creep. He glanced at his gage. A couple of more minutes, if he wanted to chance a blind landing. No—too hazardous! Death was almost certain, that way.

His hard, rugged jaw stiffening, Russ nosed down again, every sense alert, quivering. One of the lights dropped, outlining the field. Russ breathed easier. The outline was reassuring. The same shape as the 71st. Khaki-clad men were visible here and there near a building which must be the hangar.

Okay! He was safe!

Russ rolled in on the tarmac. Three khaki figures approached his plane. Russ felt the hair rising on his head. A cold fear pinched his heart. He had the illusion that he had died and that he was meeting his dead friends. He stilled the rising feeling of panic, and laughed—a short, nervous laugh.

"Nevin! Towne! Brawley! How in hell did you get here?"

Nevin and Towne did not appear to hear. Their bulging eyes were blank and glassy. But in his friend Brawley the transformation was most pronounced. A big fellow, he had been—but this living skeleton, with skin like sagging parchment and blackened tongue showing behind colorless lips—what had been done to him?

Sweat sprang out on Russ's forehead.

"Brawley," he screamed, "for heaven's sake, don't stand there staring like that. Speak, Brawley!" Russ Cameron's voice withered as panic swept over him. "Dead," he muttered thickly. "Dead, but alive! How——"

It came to him then with a horrible shock. *Zombies!*

Part of his service had been in Haiti. He had seen things which he and the other men never discussed, accidentally witnessed voodoo rites which negatived reason. Once he had seen a negro whom the curse of some witch-doctor had prevented from sleeping in his grave. Dead, the man had seemed, and yet he walked. A zombie! And the eyes of these men

were like those of the negro—glittering, staring straight ahead!

Ice formed in Russ's veins as he snapped off his ignition and the prop of his plane stopped turning. His knees shook as he climbed down and walked between these living dead men toward the hangar. In a moment, he saw his mistake. It was not a hangar; it was an old French château. Familiar, too. Something groped in his mind, and after several seconds he got the connection.

It was a château he had seen from the air, in the Bois du Noir, said to belong to some French duke or other. Then he was far west of his destination, the drome of the 71st!

And then Russ saw why this drome within Allied lines had not been found. Already other zombies were rolling down a heavy, light-green matting over the drome. A lawn, seen from the air! But the beacons? And then Russ understood that, too. They were portable beacons, not fixed beacons such as were found at the 71st. When they were wheeled out of sight, the château would have just the proper air of unkept desolation. Buried here in the woods, a mile from the main road, it had nothing to attract either interest or suspicion. Even in the day, when sentries in the towers reported that there were no other planes near by, the green matting which appeared to be grass from the air could be rolled back, and planes could take off. Three minutes later, there would be no sign that this château was anything of importance; that it housed these loathsome creatures.

Beside Russ walked his three former friends—stiffly, like huge, mechanical dolls. Goose-flesh traveled down his spine. He turned to flee. Bony hands gripped his arms, and he felt as if he were in the grip of a vise. And he was half dragged toward that château of horror.

A week before, a conked engine had saved his life by compelling him to desert a dog-fight when the Whirlwind Flight attacked. He was the only man who had seen the members of that flight of demons and lived to tell of it. Their faces, he now recalled, were like Nevin's, Towne's and Brawley's. Dead faces, devoid of expression. But those flyers had worn German uniforms.

RUSS CAMERON's brain seethed as he ascended the stone steps of the château. Other stiffly moving men were wheeling another Spad into the hangar. Had another flyer just preceded him into the trap?

They passed through an open door, turning right into a big room. Behind a desk at the other side of the room sat a small man with the face of a pig and upstanding yellow hair like porcine bristles. His uniform was gray, not khaki. Russ knew he was trapped.

His hand flashed for his automatic. Too late! Two huge Germans leapt at him from either side, pinioning his arms. Russ screamed:

"Brawley, for God's sake, help me!"

The three Americans stood like stone statues, their faces blank, while Russ struggled with the two burly Germans.

In a moment he was relieved of his automatic, and his arms trussed at his sides. Meanwhile, another man in gray approached, and led the three zombies away. Poor, doomed souls—they had led their friend in life into this trap. Would he, Russ, do likewise?

His two captors marched him forward. The officer looked up at him with small, bright eyes. "Welcome, Lieutenant."

Russ swallowed a lump in his throat.

"What have you done to Nevin and Towne and Brawley?" he demanded fiercely.

"I," said the little man, "am Baron von Kauptmann. Those are my men, members of what you American swine call the Whirlwind Flight."

The color drained from Russ's rugged face.

"Brawley fight for you?" he demanded turbulently. "I don't believe it!"

The pompous officer laughed sardonically. "Your friends have died, *Herr Leutnant.* But in dying, they have left part of themselves to serve the Fatherland. Their brain cells! In Haiti, I learn this secret, *ja?* But from voodoo I learned only part of this secret. 'Suspended death' is what I call my serum; my slaves die, but their brains live, *Herr Leutnant.*" He waved a pudgy hand at the Germans holding Russ. "I weary of baiting this stupid fool. To his cell!"

Rage burned in Russ's heart. The man's overwhelming conceit caused a red haze to swim before his stinging eyes. He broke from his captors, and started toward von Kauptmann with closed clenched fists. But heavy hands gripped his throat, and the two Germans dragged him backward, and half carried him out of the room.

Down two flights of steps he was taken, below the surface of the earth. The air was damp and sour, with a charnel scent of death which made Russ Cameron's flesh crawl. Only two electric lights illuminated perhaps twenty cages, only ten of which were filled. In the first one was a man whose old-young eyes lighted when he saw Russ. He must be the aviator who had landed just before he had.

"What is that fiend going to do with us?" he demanded hoarsely.

"Kill us," Russ formed with white lips.

The aviator's face drained of color and his face began twitching.

The reek of this morgue was so strong that Russ felt sick. On either side, as he was marched along, Russ recognized the living corpses of former friends. Their bulging eyes glittered as they sat motionless on stools staring straight ahead. None showed the slightest sign of recognition. Their parchment-like skin seemed to be drawn tightly over their skulls; they were incredibly wasted. And yet in each Russ recognized something familiar of the man he had known, and the gathering horror which washed over him caused his blood to turn to ice.

Zombies—his friends! And he was about to become another. What hellish serum was this of von Kauptmann's which could make of these dead men a fighting machine as deadly as the Whirlwind Flight which had so shattered the organization of the 71st? Did it feed the brain cells with some galvanic force such as the plates of a battery give forth by the action of acid? Some electrical action, perhaps?

He shuddered as the horror of the idea reached his dazed mind. Then he whirled on one of his captors, his fist flying toward the man's jaw. *Crack!* The powerful German went down as though pole-axed. Lightning streaked before Russ Cameron's pain-filled eyes, and his knees crumpled.

He gained consciousness from the blow he had received, to find himself in one of the cages. Outside the bars, he saw the pudgy German scientist, von Kauptmann. In his hand was a hypodermic needle. Russ felt as if his tongue had swollen so large that it filled his mouth. The end, this! He stared around his square cage. The guards had removed his stool. The only object in the cage was a pan of water.

As his eyes cleared, he saw two of the living dead men standing motionless beside von Kauptmann. Towne and Brawley! His own former friends used as the tool of his destruction! The German officer unlocked the cell-cage. Russ threw himself against the door.

"Hold him," von Kauptmann shouted.

The two zombies made stiff, awkward movements, but their hands closed on Russ's arms, and his struggles were futile. The German rattled off another order and Russ was dragged back into his cage. While they held him, von Kauptmann rolled up the American's sleeve and prepared to inject the hypodermic needle. Russ struggled afresh, his eyes wide with horror.

SUDDENLY all hell seemed to break loose in the last cell. The aviator who had been brought there before Russ began screaming and ranting. The glimpse he had had of Russ's treatment had proved too much for his reason. He flung himself against the door of his cage. He clung to it like an ape, screaming.

Von Kauptmann stiffened, scowling, with the hypodermic needle poised above Russ's bare arm. Then he laid down the needle, jumping erect.

"Verdammte!" he roared. "Of what use to me will a madman be? Leave this swine! We will attend him later!"

The zombies left the cell, walking mechanically, and von Kauptmann hastily locked the door. Relief surged over Russ so quickly that his knees buckled. The cracking of the other newcomer's reason gave him a few moments' respite. But of what use would it be to him?

He noticed the hypodermic needle containing the fiendish serum. If he could drive that into von Kauptmann's arm! No hope of that! He would send the two living dead men in first, and no needle could hurt them!

Von Kauptmann had unlocked the door of the last cell, and had ordered the mechanical men to seize the hapless aviator. He struggled with a madman's strength, but the two zombies held him, pinioned him to the floor.

"Better," von Kauptmann snarled. "that he have his serum now. If he continues like this, I can never depend on him."

He drew from his sagging pocket a kit, and removed from it a hypodermic needle. He held it up, and pushed the plunger slightly. When he saw a drop, he shook it off, and raised the man's sleeve. He plunged in the point of the needle. Then he ordered the zombies to leave the cell.

The aviator began to shake violently; then a death rattle commenced. His eyes began to glitter feverishly, and he made shaking, palsied movements. He was dying!

Russ tried to shake off the numbing feeling of horror that gripped him. He had seen his own fate! Von Kauptmann was still watching the dying man, a sardonic smile on his thick lips.

Russ seized the needle, and had an impulse to dash it to the floor. How futile! Von Kauptmann would merely substitute another needle. Then he saw the water —a chance! He swiftly squeezed the serum from the needle, and plunged the point into the pan of water. He sucked the needle full, and emptied it in a dark corner of the cage. Now, surely, the needle would be free of that deadly poison! Once more he filled it with water, and then placed it on the floor of the cage where von Kauptmann had left it.

Presently von Kauptmann returned, unlocked his cell, and ordered the zombies to hold him. Russ struggled with them to allay suspicion, but in a moment the German had rolled up his sleeve, and injected the needle into his arm. He felt the pressure of the water in his blood, and then began to shake as he had seen the other man do.

Von Kauptmann chuckled. "Another servant for the Fatherland, *ja?*"

Then he tossed a stool into the cage, and went away, leaving Towne and Brawley once more in their cages.

Russ felt weak and sick. Whether it was because of the presence of a fractional drop of the poison in his system or because of the hideous stench of dead bodies, he did not know.

How was he any better off than these corpses in this ghastly chamber of horrors? He was caged, and sooner or later von Kauptmann would discover that he was not dead. His second injection would not be water!

But the pattern of von Kauptmann's fiendish scheme was slowly clarifying in his mind. The German must have some means of turning out the beacons when night landings were to be made at the 71st. Pilots would pass their drome, only to be drawn to this château by von Kauptmann's beacons. The drome here had been deliberately laid out in similar design.

He could guess at the means by which the German had come into possession of the château. It was not hard to believe the duke who had owned it had been murdered! Von Kauptmann and the few Germans he had serving him must have been transported across the line by plane at night.

Once the American pilots had been taken prisoner, von Kauptmann had put them under his power with his fiendish serum. Thus he possessed the most deadly fighting machine in the world. Zombies could not fear death because they were already dead. They could be prey to none of the fears or misgivings of living men. The most fearful odds meant nothing to them.

Small wonder, then, that this Whirlwind Flight had stricken terror and superstition into the hearts of men of the 71st and other squadrons along the front. They understood, subconsciously, that they fought a machine composed of creatures who were, somehow, less than human.

Russ saw that his only chance was to imitate the zombies as far as possible. Prolonging his imprisonment, he might find a means of escape! With this in view, he began rubbing the dust from his cell on his face, giving it a cadaverous appearance, creating an impression of hollows beneath his cheek-bones which did not actually exist. Then, by sitting motionless on his stool in the shadows, he might escape detection for a few days. Daylight, however, would reveal the truth.

EARLY the next morning, von Kauptmann came down the corridor between the cells, chuckling to himself. Loathing for the man swept over Russ in seething waves as he sat motionless on his stool, his face in shadow, and his begrimed hands looking like claws due to the outlining of dust. If von Kauptmann had been mad, Russ might have forgiven him. But he was not mad, unless a desire to serve the Fatherland by any means, however foul, was madness. To him, this was an experiment in science, no less useful in its way than poison gas and shrapnel.

Presently a big, blond man in American lieutenant's uniform descended the stairs. Lieutenant Clinton Creel! He clicked his heels sharply together before von Kauptmann, and saluted.

Von Kauptmann frowned. "Fool!" he roared in German. "Do you wish this *Jagdstaffel* to be found by Americans, that you come here in broad daylight?"

"I beg your pardon, Your Excellency," Creel said. "But Major Miller is like a man out of his head on account of losing Lieutenant Cameron. I sought to ease his

anxiety by taking his car and a driver and searching for the lieutenant's plane to the north of the tarmac. I ordered the driver to stay with the car, and came by a round-about route through the woods searching for his plane. And I found this drome, *ja?*" His smile was cruel.

"Speak, then," von Kauptmann grunted. "But be more careful in the future."

"Your Excellency, at nine the swine of the 71st are once more going to seek the *Jagdstaffel* of the Whirlwind Flight. Disappearance of Lieutenant Cameron has aroused indignation to fever pitch."

Von Kauptmann rubbed his pudgy hands together.

"Ah, you bring us good news, Dizinger. Today we shall wipe out that squadron to the last man, no?"

"For the glory of the Fatherland," said Creel, his eyes alight.

Russ Cameron's body shook with fury. What he wouldn't have given for a blow at Creel's bland face, to have his fingers in Creel's throat!

Creel shortly took his leave, and von Kauptmann remained only a few minutes longer. He returned presently, however, with a flat-chested man in German aviator's uniform. Russ recognized the thin, tight lips and the cruel, deep-set eyes of the big, broken-nosed aviator. Taube, the German ace! Russ had met him once in battle, and both had withdrawn with conked engines. Now Taube led Americans against Americans. Irony, that!

Taube carried a tray of small bottles, covered with rubber stoppers through which von Kauptmann plunged his needle to suck up the serum. He went into one cell after another, injecting the serum.

Russ understood that it was somehow necessary to charge the brain cells of the living dead men with this serum as it was necessary to charge the cells of a battery. His body tensed. They would have to kill him before he would submit to an injection!

Von Kauptmann paused before his cell, key in hand.

"Bah!" he snorted. "I should waste my precious serum on you! You had plenty not many hours ago!"

Von Kauptmann spoke to his zombie slaves:

"You will follow the great Taube into battle and do honor to yourselves and the Fatherland! You will fight whatever he leads you against."

They departed, but guards appeared presently to release them from their cells. Russ's brain raced. Should he strike now? But the armed guards would shoot him down if he attempted it. These robots would not help him.

The chance did not come. Before Russ could form a plan, they had reached the planes, and the zombies were mechanically climbing into the cockpits.

Shaking with anger, Russ climbed into his Spad. Now it bore Boche insignia. His prop was swung by a guard, and he revved up his bus savagely. Others did likewise; and finally the chocks were kicked from under the wheels.

Taube eased forward on his stick, roaring down the field into the teeth of the wind. Two by two, the living dead men followed their enemy — followed like so many mechanical sheep a man they would gladly have killed when they were alive. Lastly, alone, Russ trundled down the field, the end man on the right wing of the flight.

Up, up, up they climbed, roaring through a sea of clouds, submerged in mist, only to emerge into a clear sky at fifteen thousand feet. Russ's mind was on escape. But Taube would not be long discovering his absence, for he looked back frequently. If he vanished, the

whole Whirlwind Flight would be after him, and he would lead this hornets' nest to the 71st.

Eastward they went, still climbing, with a glimpse of shell-gutted earth visible only infrequently through the rifts in the sea of white.

At eighteen thousand feet, they reached their ceiling, and Taube leveled out. Buzzing eastward, Russ saw a flight of German Fokkers winging westward, far in the distance, and at the tip of the cloud bank. If Taube noticed his countrymen, he gave no signal.

SUDDENLY another group of planes emerged from the clouds. The red, white and blue cockade! Members of the 71st. Russ Cameron's rough-hewn body tensed, and his heart beat a little faster.

A Very-pistol flashed its signal. *Attack!* The Spads leveled out, roared forward, straight for the Fokker flight.

Vickers and Spandaus began interlacing the intervening distance with bright red-yellow ribbons as the opposing pilots opened fire. The clattering of machine-guns could be heard even above the roaring of the Hisso motors. Russ watched, his eyes bright and hard.

Taube half turned, a cruel smile playing on his thin lips. He gave a signal which seemed to register on the eyes of the living corpses, reaching their brain cells as electrical impulses travel to a machine. The nose of his plane dipped. Down he went, his motor wailing. And behind him followed the Americans, only one of whom was aware of the horrible thing they were about to do.

Russ, his eyes twitching with anger, knew Taube's plan. Taube struck the American flight from behind, while they were occupied with the German Fokkers. The German's claw-like hand reached for the stick-trigger of his machine-gun.

At that instant, Russ saw red. He knew these men followed Taube blindly, that they might take as enemies anyone acting against him. Something of this machine, however, must break. Russ could wait no longer.

He side-slipped, feeding his Spad full gun. Then he roared forward, straight for the tail of the diving German. Russ had never shot a man in the back before; now, however, there was no other course.

Taube's plane was outlined against the hair-line of his ring-sight. Russ squeezed the trigger of his Vickers. Twin streams of steel-jacketed lead lashed out, striking the German's back. He crumpled over his stick, never knowing what had happened. His plane went into a plunge, nose to earth, tail to the sky.

Russ's wild attack had carried him into Taube's position in the flight. Instinctively he flinched. Bullets would soon be tearing his body to ribbons! Moments crawled, and finally Russ turned. He shuddered as he saw the eyes of the corpses upon him—glassy, expressionless eyes.

They told him nothing. But their failure to attack could mean but one thing. *He* was now their leader! Incapable of more than the automatic action their training in flying had given them, they could not do anything save obey some thinking leader. Russ was that leader! A wave of exultation flowed over him. His was the command of the most deadly fighting machine on the western front! The Germans would taste their own medicine!

Russ pulled back on his stick slightly, his eyes hardening. The men of the 71st had not yet seen the Whirlwind Flight.

Russ nosed down toward the Fokkers, passed them. Then, bringing his nose up sharply, he accomplished a reversal by means of an Immelmann turn. Like au-

tomatons, the corpses executed the maneuver with him. When they came about, they were roaring down on the tails of the black-cross planes.

The Yanks saw them, then. Consternation must have filled their souls. The momentary paralysis which gripped them alone saved Russ.

Guns bickering, he roared down on the tails of the Fokkers. One plane was dead-centered in his ring-sight. Russ kicked left—then right-rudder—raking the plane with a cross-fire. Smoke curled up from the Fokker in black tendrils which were instantly pierced with darting tongues of flame.

The other members of the Whirlwind Flight slashed into the battle with the same deadly fury. Fokkers were being raked fore and aft. Pilots crumpled over sticks or tried to climb out of the devastating streams of incendiary-sprinkled lead.

But as they started to climb, the bewildered Yank pilots acted. The noses of their planes lifted. They zoomed after the fleeing Fokkers, driving in burst after burst of screaming lead.

From odds against them, the odds now favored them. They must have felt there was a mistake which would be quickly rectified when the Whirlwind Flight realized what they were doing. But they took advantage of what they believed to be an error.

Thrust between two such deadly fires, the Fokkers were doomed. Below them were the Yanks; above, the Whirlwind machine. One plane after another broke into flames. Bullets wrecked and slashed and tore the German ships to ribbons.

Russ saw a second pilot fall dead under his withering fire. Then a third. . . .

The red haze which had swum before his eyes began clearing. Only one German pilot left, and he streaked for home.

Russ gave his signal, and zoomed. The Yank leader started to pursue, then dropped back. It was impossible for him to attack a flight which had saved his life, even though that flight bore black crosses. He waved, and presently his flight vanished in the sea of clouds. "Now what?" Russ asked himself. "If I return to the 71st, this legion of corpses will follow, and destroy everything in their path. Not even the 71st could escape! But if I return to von Kauptmann, I'll chance being discovered. At the very least, I'll be thrown into a cell."

Even those alternatives seemed preferable to risking the lives of his comrades at the 71st. Reluctantly, Russ returned with the machine.

When he landed, von Kauptmann strode angrily toward them. Russ carefully fell in behind several of the taller men; daylight was too revealing.

Von Kauptmann snorted: "Taube gone! *Verdammte!* It is evil luck!" But suddenly his face brightened. "Perhaps I have a greater machine than I realized if it is capable of going into battle and returning without a leader! *Ach!* no longer will I need that dope-fiend, Taube!"

Chuckling to himself and rubbing his soft hands together with satisfaction, von Kauptmann had the guards return them to their cages. Russ Cameron saw no chance to escape.

But when he was once more the sole living man in that chamber of the dead, Russ began pacing his cell impatiently. Creel would soon find some means of reporting what had really happened. Von Kauptmann would return to the cages with a better light. It would not require long for him to discover the one living man—and Russ would not be living long!

A guard came to the corridor, and released Brawley. Then he unlocked Towne's cage. Russ's heart beat fast as the guard paused before his own cell. Von Hauptmann was using these zombies for some work or other. If Russ could but secure his release! One man against one man!

And then Russ's pulses began pounding as the guard began unlocking his cage. It was an effort to keep his facial muscles under control, to sit motionless while his chance was coming.

Outside, he heard the drone of an airplane motor, the whine as it dived. He knew as well as if he could see that Creel was making the pretense of looking for the Whirlwinds so that he could communicate with von Kauptmann. In a moment, his chance would be gone. The guard hesitated, listening. Russ's heart was in his throat.

And then the key turned!

"Come out," the guard grunted.

Russ rose stiffly, and walked stiff-legged until he was a foot from the guard. Then the big German's mouth opened as he detected a false note in Russ's disguise—he was breathing.

Before the guard could utter a sound, Russ sprang. His fingers closed on the German's fleshy throat, shutting off all sound. But he was a big fellow, and Russ was weak from lack of food. The German rolled him over, clawing for his gun. Desperate as the Luger came out of the German's holster, Russ rolled him over on that side. There was no time for the niceties of fighting.

With sinking heart, he heard Creel's excited voice somewhere above and von Kauptmann's bellow of rage. A shot from this guard would be his end. But if he could gain a few moments, he had a chance.

That was why, as he came over on top of the German and saw the gun flashing toward him, he thrust the big head swiftly toward the stone flooring. The crunch of the German's skull made him shiver—but the gun did not explode.

Meanwhile Towne and Brawley had stood like statues, taking no part in the affair.

Russ seized the guard's keys, hastily unlocking one cell after another until he was surrounded by living corpses. Then he picked up the Luger, and turned to the men.

"Follow me," he commanded them. "Seize the guns of men who try to oppose you. Obey no one but me! Now—*forward!*"

Von Kauptmann was bellowing orders. There was a clamor above, then the sound of many footsteps, as men descended the stairs.

Russ sprang toward the entrance of the dungeon, Luger in hand.

A guard came into view. His rifle spat flame, and a bullet pinged from one of the cages. Before he could fire again, Russ's Luger cracked.

The guard stumbled and fell. Russ paused only long enough to toss the rifle to Brawley.

Three more guards were just behind the fallen German. They blazed away. Bullets whistled and whined above Russ's head.

He dropped another man. Brawley rushed forward, his rifle spitting lead. The two remaining guards died before they could fire second shots.

"Seize their weapons!" Russ shouted hoarsely at the zombies, as he leapt over the bodies.

Another German descending the stairs aimed point-blank. Lead ricocheted from the stone walls. Russ brought his gun crashing down on the man's head. He could hear the German's skull crack.

Up the stairs Russ ran, the Americans close on his heels. The Whirlwind Flight was still the most deadly fighting machine in the world. But it was not von Kauptmann's to command. The baron might change that, given the chance, but Russ was determined he would meet the German first.

He could hear men running ahead, realizing they faced death on the stairs from a group of zombies who could not be killed. Their destruction could be wrought only by the difficult head-shot which would destroy the brain cells directing them.

Russ came upon a straggler who had stumbled. Wild-eyed, the man sprang to his feet, his gun exploding. Powder seared Russ Cameron's cheek, and he squeezed the trigger of his gun. The German's body sagged. Russ picked up his weapon as he bounded up the stairs.

Above, von Kauptmann's roaring voice:

"Go down those stairs, you swine! Fire at their heads! I'll kill the man who hesitates."

A shot echoed from the walls as if to emphasize his words. The guards could be heard clumping down again.

RUSS met them at the second landing. Bullets swirling about him, he rushed toward them. Lead seared his shoulder, but he ran on. Clubbing with his automatic, he beat down a guard about to fire. The living-dead men, with the gray, waxen countenances of corpses, surged forward, firing with deadly accuracy. The guards melted under their fire.

Picking up an automatic which had fallen, Russ took the stairs two steps at a time. Half-way up the last flight, he met Creel and von Kauptmann.

The German spy raised his automatic, squeezing the trigger. But fear of the grisly legion of the dead racing toward him made his hand shake. Lead whined in Russ Cameron's ear as he bounded up the stairs.

Von Kauptmann was shouting at the zombies to stop. They could not hear him yet above the cracking of Creel's spitting gun. Russ's fingers itched for the traitor's throat — but it was von Kauptmann he must reach first, von Kauptmann he must silence before he lost control of the machine.

"Creel!" Russ screamed hoarsely. "Kill Creel, men!"

He raised his automatic, squeezed the trigger. A sharp click. Empty! Creel turned his gun away from Russ, aiming at the oncoming horde, his eyes wide with horror. Von Kauptmann pointed his weapon at the American leader. Russ hurled his empty weapon, striking von Kauptmann's right arm. The Luger flew from the German's hand. He stooped for it. . . .

Russ threw himself at the legs of the leaning man, and they went down together. Von Kauptmann struck at his face with a pudgy fist. The American's hand clutched at the German's throat. And then a rushing tide struck him, and he felt a damp, icy hand slide past his face. The hand of the dead!

Von Kauptmann was free for a moment, groping for the gun. Russ got to his knees, and then was hurled violently against von Kauptmann. He heard a piercing scream—Creel's voice. He could not turn—with von Kauptmann's fingers groping for the gun.

Russ's hands closed on yielding flesh. A blindness of rage made the world spin around him. Von Kauptmann, who had created these ghastly creatures from men Russ had known! The German fought, but Russ was scarcely aware of the hands

clutching and clawing madly at him. His fingers grew damp with blood, ached from the strain. And a boiling surge of exultation swept over him as he felt von Kauptmann's body relax. The screams echoing through the stone halls only made him press the harder.

Then, slowly, the madness passed, leaving him sick with loathing at what he had done. Russ reeled to his feet, gazing with a horrible fascination at the grisly creature who lay dead at his feet. Von Kauptmann! Shuddering, he turned his eyes away, only to encounter a sight which made his backbone crawl. Creel—he had forgotten!

But the zombies had remembered. Expressionless, with glistening eyes, they were tearing and rending a bloody, misshapen thing. Creel! Life remained in that gory bundle of rags? It must! For the thing at which the zombies were tearing and mauling like vultures over a kill was still screaming in a way that froze Russ's heart. He had heard the frightful screams of pilots being burned alive in flaming planes—but nothing like this!

Sick and nauseated, Russ picked up the gun von Kauptmann had tried to reach, and fired three shots at the quivering thing these incredible creatures mauled. Convulsive movements shook the tormented body, and then Russ hoarsely ordered the zombies to stand at attention. Then he made an inspection of the château and hangars. No one! Guards and mechanics must have served in double capacity.

Now what would he do with these zombies? Von Kauptmann could have told him—but he was dead. Placing a gun at their heads and destroying their brains would have permitted them to return to their graves. But that he could not do—these men who had once been his friends. Another idea!

Returned to their graves, a deadly fighting machine would be lost! Why not turn the hellish machine once more against the people who had devised it? Why not let these zombies leave earth fighting?

"Fuel busses, men," Russ ordered them. "We're taking off directly."

The corpses obeyed. Mechanically, they fueled planes and placed them on the dead-line under Russ's direction. When all were ready, Russ took his position at the point of the V-flight, and taxied down the field.

Not until they had crossed the German lines did they meet a German patrol —three wings flying in formation. Terrific odds! But what did odds mean to dead men? Only to Russ could it matter.

THE details of that fight were never quite clear in Russ's mind. It came back in nightmares, and he would awake with his body wringing wet, and his eyes wide with horror, staring at blackness. But before he awoke, he would experience again some of those moments which had branded his subconscious mind with sights and smells and sounds unforgettable.

Bickering guns, cracking planes, bellowing motors. Screams from dying Germans which rose above the shrieking of diving, darting planes.

A machine which followed his every move. Glittering eyes registered his movements on the serum-drugged brains, and the robot flight responded. They smashed up one wing, scattered it. And then the Germans broke formation, each singly bearing down on members of the Whirlwind Flight. But what could humans do against that grisly legion?

Zombies' planes caught fire, and still the dead men followed Russ, staring fixedly through walls of flame, and fight-

ing until the planes disintegrated and dropped horribly-charred bodies through the clouds.

Brawley's ship burst into flames. Yet he still sat at the controls, his hand on his machine-gun trigger, frozen-faced as a statue. A Fokker staggered under his fire, and went plunging to destruction.

Even flames could not break his machine! It was invincible while fabric and machinery would hold together—an invincible armada of the skies! But one by one the corpses were released from their bondage, their heads riddled with bullets, or their bodies blackened with flames.

Russ remembered in those nightmares that they fought what seemed endless years, while one after another dropped out of his squadron; fought until only he and two Germans remained, and, as if both were sickened by the carnage, turned away and limped home.

Only when he awoke, his body shaking, did he remember the end: how he had landed the plane bearing the German insignia on his home drome by diving through a hail of anti-aircraft fire; and how, with glazed eyes, he had told Major Miller of those things which he could scarcely bring himself to believe.

"Leave it to me," the C. O. had said gently. "I'll recommend you for a Distinguished Service Medal—and there's no chance in the world you won't get it, after destroying that Whirlwind Flight. But how you destroyed it and who composed that flight—well, I believe you because there's nothing else this side of hell which could account for that Flight. But we'll have to have another story for the brass hats!"

The horror had slowly left Russ Cameron's eyes.

"That's best," he had agreed.

Ghost

By LEONA AMES HILL

I shall go lonely, bid farewell to light,
  And wander through the fields a subtle ghost,
Seeking the shuddering pathway of the night
  Back to the land I knew and loved the most.

And should you whom I loved most seek me there,
  A dark leaf shaken from an autumn tree
By wind that drifts across the moonlit air
  Will be the clear sign you shall have from me.

The Black Orchid

By SEABURY QUINN

An eery mystery tale of a botanical monstrosity from Madagascar—a tale of Jules de Grandin

UNDER the combined influence of an excellent dinner and two ounces of 1845 cognac our guest became expansive. "D'ye know," he told us as he passed the brandy sniffer beneath his nose, inhaling the fruity fragrance of the ancient liqueur, "I believe I've run across a new disease."

"Ah?" murmured Jules de Grandin courteously, casting a quick wink in my direction. "You interest me, *Monsieur.* What are the symptoms of this hitherto unknown disorder?"

Young Doctor Traherne beamed upon us genially. When one is barely thirty, fresh from his internship and six months' study in Vienna, there is a spice in being told that your discoveries interest physicians who were practising when you were in the cradle. "It's a—a bloodless hemorrhage," he confided.

De Grandin's narrow brows receded nearly half an inch toward the line of his sleekly brushed blond hair. *"Pardonnez-moi, Monsieur,"* he begged. "I fear I do not understand the English fluently. You said—perhaps I did not hear it right?—that you had found a bloodless hemorrhage?"

Traherne applied a match to his cigar and chuckled.

"That's it, sir," he answered. "Six months ago they called me to attend old Mr. Sorensen. At first I thought he suffered from anemia, but a check-up on his blood convinced me the trouble was more quantitative than qualitative. The man showed every evidence of hemorrhage exhaustion, and as there was no sign of external blood escape, I naturally suspected carcinoma and internal bleeding, but when I tested him I found there was no trace of it. There he was, with no wound or lesion—absolutely no way by which he could have lost a teaspoonful of blood—bleeding to death progressively. I put him on a blood-producing diet, fed him wine and iron and liver enough to fill a fair-sized warehouse, but every morning he showed fresh evidences of prostration till I had to fall back on glucose injections, and finally resorted to transfusions."

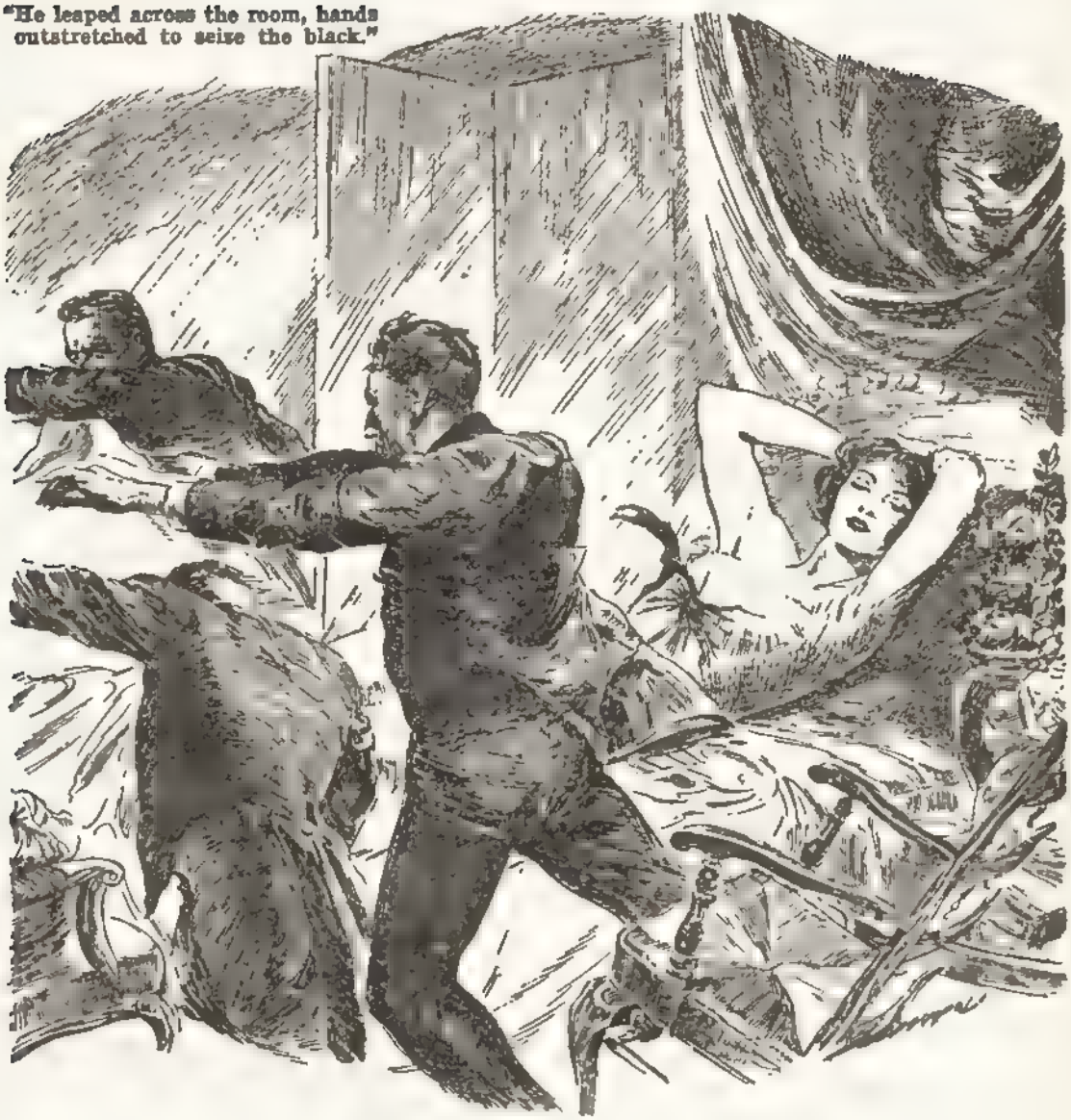
De Grandin's interest showed more than merely formal courtesy as Traherne finished his description.

"And when did this one die?" he asked, a sudden cutting-edge of sharpness in his voice.

"He didn't," answered Traherne with a grin. "Just by luck I hit upon the idea of a cruise—thought he might as well pass out with a ship's doctor in attendance as to have me sign the death certificate—so I shipped him off on a Caribbean trip. He was back in ninety days, hale and hearty as ever, without a sign of the strange condition which had nearly caused his death."

"Eh bien, you are to be congratulated," said the Frenchman with a smile. "Our trade is one part science and the other nine parts luck, *n'est-ce-pas?"*

"But here's the funny part," Traherne replied. "Sorensen's been home just six weeks, and he's got it again. Not only



"He leaped across the room, hands outstretched to seize the black."

that, his niece, who lives with him, has it too, and her condition's even worse than his. Hanged if I can figure it. Whatever influence has caused this condition has undoubtedly been the same in both cases—the symptoms are so exactly similar, but there's absolutely no normal or apparent explanation for it. Think of it, gentlemen. Here are two people, one a man near eighty, but remarkably vigorous and well preserved, without a single trace of degenerative disease of any sort, the other a young woman in her early twenties, and for no apparent reason they both begin to show positively defined symptoms of extensive hemorrhage without a sign of bleeding. They respond to conventional treatment for loss of blood, but lapse into hemorrhage prostration almost overnight. If I were a Negro or a back-county Pennsylvanian I'd say it was a case of voodoo curse or hexing, but being a physician and a man of science I can only conclude these peo-

ple are victims of some strange and as yet unclassified disease. Quite probably it's contagious, too, since the niece appears to have contracted it by contact with the uncle."

"H'm," de Grandin murmured thoughtfully. "Has it occurred to you, *mon collègue,* that the evil which attacks these two is really old as Egypt's mighty pyramids or Babylon's tall temples?"

"Oh, you mean some old disease which ravaged ancient peoples and has passed out of medical memory, like the Black Death of medieval Europe?"

"*Précisément,* the blackest of black deaths, my friend."

"You know about it—you've seen such cases?" young Traherne asked, a shade of disappointment in his voice.

"I would not say that," de Grandin answered. "I have observed such symptoms, not once, but many times, but only fools attempt a diagnosis at long distance. I should greatly like to have the chance to see the victims of this so strange illness. Could you arrange an interview?"

"Why, yes," the other smiled. "I'm going to drop by Sorensen's house tonight, just to see that everything is going smoothly. Would you care to come along?"

OSCAR SORENSEN was one of those unusual characters found in many of the small, submetropolitan communities which fringe New York. Almost eighty years of age, he had served a rigorous apprenticeship as soldier of fortune, and, unlike most of that breed, he had succeeded. Late in life he retired from service to a half-score countries with military decorations enough to decorate an army corps and a fortune more than large enough to let him end the quiet close of his eventful life in luxury. He had fought in Egypt, China, the Levant, in India and the troubled Balkans, as well as over every foot of Central America. Serving with the Cubans under Garcia, he left the island as a brigadier general of *insurrectos,* his pockets lined with fat commissions from Americans who had seen the wisdom of buying what they wanted. As a commandant of Boer cavalry he had thriftily secured enough rough diamonds to make the unsuccessful war the Dutchmen waged a most remunerative enterprise for him; the loot of half a dozen Spanish cities near the Caribbean Sea had somehow found its way into his pocket, whether he had served the Government or revolutionary forces.

He looked the part which Fate had cast him for. Over six feet tall and proportionately broad, his prominent cheekbones and narrow face bespoke his Viking ancestry, as did his fair skin and light eyes. His face was tanned to the shade of unstained oak by long exposure to the tropic sun, tiny wrinkles splayed out from the corners of his eyes, and a white crescent of scar-tissue outlined the path of an old knife or spear wound from right eye to temple.

Even without having seen the man before, I realized he was little better than a wraith of his former self. Violet half-moons underneath his eyes, a waxen pallor underlying the sunburn of his face and the pinched look of distress about his nose all testified eloquently to the sudden weakness which had fallen on him.

"I've heard of you, de Grandin," he acknowledged as Doctor Traherne finished introductions, "and I think it's time we had you in for consultation. I've been telling myself that what was wrong with me was nothing but a fresh recurrence of malaria, but all along I knew

that it was nothing for a sawbones' treatment. You're a ghost-fighter, aren't you? Good. I've got a ghost for you to fight, and it'll take the best you've got to whip it, too!"

The little Frenchman raised his narrow, high-arched brows a trifle. "A ghost, *Monsieur?*" he countered. "But Doctor Traherne informs us that——"

"Excuse me," cut in Sorensen, "but this is no matter for scientific speculation, I'm afraid. Of course Traherne informs you it's some strange form of anemia we're suffering from. You're a doctor, too; but you've traveled. You've seen things outside the dissecting-rooms and clinics and laboratories. Listen:

"You've been in savage countries; you know there's something to the power that the native witches claim. Here in civilization, with gas to cook our food and electricity to light us on our way to bed, we've forgotten all the old-time powers of the witch, so we say there never was any such thing, and brand belief in it as superstition. *Valgame Dios,*" he swore in Spanish, "those who've traveled the remote spots of the world know what is so and what is superstition. In Polynesia I've seen men—whites as well as natives—shrivel and die by inches just because some native witch-doctor prayed them to death. On the African West Coast I've seen owls, owls large as eagles, perch in trees by villages, and next day some dweller in the settlement would die in frightful pain. I've seen Papuan wizards dance around their night-fires till the spirits of the dead came back—yes, by Heaven, with my own eyes I saw my mother, lying twenty years and more in her grave out there in St. Stephen's churchyard, stand across a Dyak campfire from me while a native sorcerer danced about the flames to the rhythm of a tom-tom!"

"*Parbleu,* but you have right, my friend," de Grandin nodded in agreement. "The dwellers in the silent places, they know these things; they have not forgotten; they remember, and they know. Me——"

"Excuse me," Traherne cut in dryly, "I hate to interrupt these reminiscences, but would you mind telling Doctor de Grandin about the onset of your illness, Mr. Sorensen?"

The old man looked at him much as an annoyed adult might regard the impertinent interruption of a child. "You've been in Madagascar?" he demanded of de Grandin.

"But naturally," the little Frenchman answered. "And you, *Monsieur?*"

"I was there with Gallieni in 1895, serving as *sous-lieutenant* of *chasseurs,* later as commandant of a detail of native guides. It was while serving with my detachment that I met Mamba. She was the daughter of an Andriana, or noble, family, distantly related to Ranavalona, the native queen just deposed by the French. Her skin was black as a minorca's wing, with a blue, almost iridescent sheen; her features were small and delicate, her body as beautiful as anything ever chiseled out of marble in the Periclean age. She had tremendous influence not only with the Hova, or middle-class natives, but with the Andriana as well; for she was reputedly a witch and priestess of 'the Fragrant One', and a word from her would bring any native, noble or commoner, from miles around crawling on his belly to lick her tiny, coal-black feet, or send him charging down upon French infantry, though he knew sure death awaited from our chassepots and Gatling guns.

"It was good politics to cultivate her friendship, and not at all unpleasant, I assure you. We were married in due

state, and I was formally invested with all the rights and dignities of an Andriana noble of the highest caste. Things went smoothly at our outpost after that, till——" he paused, and for a moment closed his eyes as though in weariness.

"Yes, *Monsieur,* and then?" de Grandin prompted as the silence lengthened.

Sorensen seemed to wake up with a start. "Then I heard how things were going over in the Caribbean, and decided to resign my commission with the French and try my luck with *Cuba Libre,*" he returned.

"Mamba didn't make a scene. Indeed, she took it more calmly than most civilized women would have done. It had never occurred to her that our little domestic arrangement wasn't permanent; so when I told her I'd been ordered away she merely said that she would govern in my place till my return and take good care 'our people' gave no trouble to the French. Then, like a fool, I told her I was through.

"For a moment she looked as though she hadn't understood me; then, when the meaning of my words sank in, she was awful in her anger. No tears, no wailing, just a long and dreadful stare, a stare that seemed to strike right through me and to shrivel everything it touched. Finally she raised both hands above her head and called down such a curse on me as no man has had heaped upon his head since Medea called the vengeance of the gods on Jason. She finished with the prophecy:

" 'At the last you shall feel Mamba's kiss, and your blood shall waste and dry away as the little brooks in summer, yet no man shall see you bleed; your life shall slowly ebb away as the tide ebbs from the shore, and none shall give you help; flowers shall feed upon your body while you are still alive, and the thing you most adore shall waste and wither in your sight, yet you shall have no power to stay the doom which crushes her and which shall crush you, too, when she is gone. I have said.' "

YOUNG Doctor Traherne coughed. His manner was discreet, but none too patient, as he asked, "And you think this black woman's curse responsible for your condition, sir?"

"I don't know," Sorensen answered slowly. "In China they've a saying that the three things which age can't soften are a sword, a stone and the hatred of a love-crossed woman. Mamba——"

"Has probably been dead for twenty years," Traherne supplied. "Besides, there's half the earth between you, and——"

"Listen, son," Sorensen broke in, "I've been deluding myself into thinking it was a nightmare which I suffered from—possibly the prickings of a guilty conscience—and that my subsequent illness was merely a coincidence, but I'm far from certain, now. Here's what happened just before we called you in:

"I'd been trap-shooting over at the Gun and Rod Club, and came home thoroughly tired out. Joyce and I had dinner early and I went off to bed almost as soon as the meal was over, falling asleep immediately. How long I slept I've no idea, but I remember waking with a feeling of suffocation—no pain, but utter weakness and prostration—to see something hovering above my throat and to smell a smell I hadn't smelled in years, the hot, half-spicy, half-charnel odor of the Madagascar jungle. I can't describe the thing that hovered over me, for the darkness of the room and its very nearness obscured my vision, but I had an unaccountable but powerful impression that it was a small, black, naked

human figure, the figure of a nude black woman a scant four inches high, which poised in midair over me as a hummingbird poises above the flower from which it drains the nectar. How long I lay there in that helpless sort of lethargy I've no idea; but suddenly I became aware of a feeling like a pulling at my throat and Mamba's prophecy came back to me across the years: 'Your blood shall waste and dry up as the little brooks in summer!'

"Gentlemen, I assure you I was paralyzed. Fear held me more firmly than a chain. Move I could not, nor could I cry for help. Then I think I must have fainted, for the next thing I knew it was morning.

"Weakness almost overpowered me when I tried to rise, but finally I managed to crawl from bed and stagger over to the mirror. There was no blood on my pajamas, nor any on my flesh, but on my throat there was a little wound, no larger than a needle-jab or razor-nick would make, and——"

"Tell me, *Monsieur,*" de Grandin interrupted, "this wound of which you speak, was it singular or plural?"

"Eh? Oh, I see what you mean. It was a single little puncture, so small as to be barely noticeable, and with no area of inflammation or soreness round it. At any other time I should have failed to see it, I believe, but the vividness of my nightmare made me especially careful when I looked."

"But this is most unusual," the little Frenchman murmured. "Those punctures, they should be multiple."

"What's that?"

"Nothing of importance, I assure you. I did but indulge in a foolish habit and think with my lips rather than my brain, *Monsieur*. Please be so kind as to proceed."

"I don't remember a recurrence of the dream, but every morning for a week I rose from heavy sleep not only not refreshed by rest, but successively and progressively weaker. Finally we called Doctor Traherne. He's probably outlined his treatment to you."

"You agree I took the proper measures?" Traherne asked. "We had this condition entirely arrested; then——"

"Précisément," de Grandin nodded, "that is a most unusual feature of the case, my friend; that and the nature of Monsieur Sorensen's wound."

"Oh, Lord!" young Traherne scoffed. "Are you finding a connection between that accidental scratch and this inexplicable pathological condition? What possible——"

"But the wound is constant, is it not?" de Grandin insisted. "It is still there? Either it or a freshly inflicted one remains, *n'est-ce-pas?"*

"Ye-es," Traherne admitted grudgingly. "But I've never tried to heal it. Even if it is significant, it's nothing but a symptom, and one doesn't bother to treat symptoms."

De Grandin faced Sorensen. "Your niece, Mademoiselle Joyce, she displays symptoms similar to those you first exhibited?" he asked.

"Yes," the other answered. "I'll send for her, if you wish." He pressed a button, and when a small, exceedingly neat and almost startlingly black servant appeared in answer to the summons, ordered: "Ask Miss Joyce to come to the library, please, Marshall."

"Would you object to showing us your throat while we are waiting for your niece to join us?" asked de Grandin.

"Not at all," the other answered, and undoing the collar of his soft silk shirt laid bare a strongly modeled and well-muscled neck.

The little Frenchman leant forward, scanned the patient's sunburned skin with a keen gaze, then, drawing a small lens from his pocket, held it before his eye as he pursued the examination.

"Here, *Monsieur?*" he asked, laying the tip of a small, well-manicured forefinger on Sorensen's neck a little to the right and above the Adam's apple. "Is this the place you first observed the wound?"

"Yes, and that's the spot where it reappeared when I was taken ill again," Sorensen answered.

"H'm," the Frenchman murmured. "It is, as you have said, a single wound striking directly into the skin, not looping through it. It might be from a razor cut or from a variety of other reasons——"

"Yes, and it wasn't there before my first illness; it disappeared when I recovered, and it reappeared concurrently with my second attack," Sorensen broke in.

"Precisely, exactly; quite so," de Grandin agreed with a quick nod. "There is some connection between the puncture and your trouble, *Monsieur,* I am convinced of it, but the explanation does not leap to the eye. We shall have to think of this. If——"

A RUSTLE at the doorway cut his conversation short as a young girl entered. She was tall and very slender, exceedingly fair-skinned, with a wealth of yellow hair which she wore coiled simply in a figure 8 at the nape of her neck. Her nose and mouth were small and very finely molded, and her brown eyes seemed out of all proportion to her other features, for they were almost startlingly enlarged by the deep violet semicircles which lay beneath them. She walked slowly, haltingly, as though the effort cost her almost every ounce of hoarded strength, and when she spoke her voice was low, partly from the natural softness of its timbre, but more, it seemed to me, from an extremity of fatigue.

"Will you tell Doctor de Grandin about your illness, dear?" Sorensen asked, his hard blue eyes softening with affection as he looked at her. "Doctor Traherne thinks possibly Doctor de Grandin and Doctor Trowbridge may have come across something like it in their practise."

Joyce Sorensen shuddered as though a chilly wind had suddenly blown across her shoulders, and her thin hands clasped together in her lap in a gesture that seemed to entreat mercy from fate. "Everything, Uncle Oscar?" she asked softly.

"Of course."

"I recall my uncle's first attack perfectly," she began, not looking at us, but fixing a half-vacant, half-pleading gaze upon a miniature of the Madonna which hung upon the farther wall. "He'd been out shooting that afternoon and went to bed almost immediately after dinner. I had a theater engagement, and went to the Pantoufle Dorée to dance afterward. It must have been about one o'clock when I came home. Marshall, the butler, was in bed, of course, so I let myself in and went up to kiss Uncle Oscar good-night before going to my own room. Just as I reached his door I heard him cry out, not loudly, but terribly. It sounded something like the screaming laughs maniacs give in melodramatic motion pictures—it seemed to spout up like a dreadful geyser of insane fear, then died away to a kind of gurgling, choking murmur, like water running down a drain, or a man fighting desperately for breath.

"I tried his door and it was locked—I'm sure of that. Then in terror I ran up

to Marshall's room and beat upon his door, calling out that Uncle Oscar was dying; but he gave no answer, so I ran back to the library and snatched a sword down from the wall——" She nodded to a row of brackets where mementoes of Sorensen's grim fighting years were displayed. "I was determined to force the lock with the blade," she went on, "but when I reached my uncle's room again the door was partly open!

"Uncle Oscar lay upon his bed, the covers pushed to the floor, his hands flexed and his fingers digging into the mattress. His pajama jacket was open at the throat, and on the white skin of his neck, just below the line of tan, there was a little spot of blood, no larger than a pin-head.

"I hurried back to Marshall's room, and this time he heard me right away. Together we got my uncle back beneath the covers and made him comfortable. I spoke to him and he answered sleepily, assuring me he was all right; so I assumed he must have had a nightmare and thought no more about it. It wasn't till progressive weakness made it impossible for him to rise that we became worried and called in Doctor Traherne."

As she finished her recital de Grandin rose and leant above her. *"Pardonnez-moi, Mademoiselle,"* he begged, "but have you, too, by any chance, a stubborn so small wound which gives no pain, but which will not heal? You have noted something of the kind upon your throat?"

The quick blood dyed her face and forehead faintly as she turned startled eyes upon him. "Not on my throat, sir," she answered softly, "here."

She laid her hand upon her breast above the heart.

"Eh, death of the devil, do you say so?" he exclaimed; then, very gently: "And may we see, *Mademoiselle?*"

There was something pleading, frightened, timidly beseeching, in the eyes that never strayed from his as she undid the fastenings of her robe and bared a bosom slim as Shakespeare's Juliet's, pointing out a tiny depression which lay against the milk-white skin an inch or so below the gentle swelling of the small and pointed breast.

"Ah?" de Grandin murmured as he finished his inspection. "Trowbridge, if you please, come here and tell me what it is you see."

He passed his glass to me and, obedient to his pointing finger, I fixed my glance upon the girl's pale skin. Piercing directly downward was a tiny punctured wound, semilunar in shape and less than an eighth of an inch in length. There was no area of inflammation round it; indeed, the lips of the small aperture seemed wholly bloodless, like those of a stab-wound inflicted on a corpse.

"There is soreness?" asked the Frenchman, gently touching the skin above the wound.

"None at all," the girl replied.

"And blood?"

"A little, sometimes. Some mornings I wake feeling really rested from my sleep. On these mornings the wound seems nearly healed. Other times I am so weak I can scarcely leave my bed, and I've noticed that at such times there is a little smear of blood—oh, not more than a single drop, and that a very small one —on my skin."

"Thank you, *Mademoiselle,*" de Grandin nodded absently, his lips, beneath his trimly waxed mustache, slightly pursed, as though he were about to whistle. "Tell us, if you please, have you been troubled with unpleasant dreams, like that which plagued *Monsieur* your uncle?"

"Why, no; that is, I can't remember

any," she replied. "Indeed, I'm perfectly all right, except for this great weakness. Do you know what the disease is, Doctor? Doctor Traherne thinks it may be caused by some strange germ——"

"I make no doubt that he is right," the little Frenchman answered. "A most strange germ, *Mademoiselle.* A very strange germ, indeed."

"WELL," Traherne asked as we left the house after bidding Sorensen and his niece good-night, "what d'ye make of it, gentlemen? Have either of you ever seen anything resembling that condition, or——"

"I have," de Grandin broke in shortly. "On several occasions I have seen such things, my friend, but never with the same accompanying circumstances. If those wounds were perforated, I should be convinced. As it is, I am in doubt, but——"

"But what?" Traherne demanded as the Frenchman failed to bring his statement to conclusion.

De Grandin's voice was flat and absolutely toneless as he answered: "*Monsieur,* if I should tell you what it is I think that lies behind this so strange business of the monkey, you would scoff. You would not believe me. Your mind, *pardieu,* is far too logical. You would say to you, '*Cordieu,* I have never seen nor heard of anything like this, therefore it cannot be.' Nevertheless, I am inclined to think the cause of Monsieur Sorensen's illness, and that of his so charming niece, strikes back directly to that night in Madagascar when he pronounced divorcement on his native wife. It is, in fine, a thing which lies below the realms of logic, therefore something to be combated by perfectly illogical counter-measures."

"Humph," Traherne grunted.

"First I advise that you secure a corps of nurses, nurses you can trust implicitly. Have one in attendance on Monsieur Sorensen and another on his niece at every moment of the day and night."

"O. K.," Traherne agreed, "I've been thinking of that. They're both too weak to be about. Bed-rest is bound to help them. What next?"

"I suggest that you secure a generous supply of *ail*—how do you say him? garlic?—*allium sativum* in the pharmacopeia—and have it liberally distributed at all entrances and exits of their rooms. See, too, that their windows are kept entirely closed, and that all animals are rigorously excluded from their presence."

Traherne, I could see, was angry, but he kept his temper in control as he demanded: "Then, I suppose, you'd like to have me burn some incense in their rooms, and maybe bring in an Indian medicine man to sing to them? Really, Doctor, you're amusing."

A smile which had no mirth in it swept across de Grandin's mobile lips. "*Monsieur,*" he answered acidly, "I regret my inability to reciprocate the compliment, but I do not find you amusing. No, not at all; by no means. I find you distinctly annoying. Your mind is literal as a problem in addition. You believe in something only if you know the cause of it; you have faith in remedies only if you know their application. Smallpox, diftheria, scarlet fever? Yes, of course, you know them. Dementia precox, yes, you know it, too. But subtle problems of the mind—a hate, which is malign thought made crystal-hard by concentration—*morbleu,* you will have none of it! 'I have not seen it, therefore there is no such thing,' you say.

"Attend me, *mon petit bonhomme:* When every button which you wore was but a safety-pin, I was studying the oc-

cult. 'Ah,' I hear you say, 'occult—magic—balderdash!' Yes, you think I speak in terms of witches riding broomsticks, but it is not so.

"On more than one occasion I have seen men sicken and die when their symptoms were strangely similar to those of Monsieur Sorensen and Mademoiselle Joyce. Yes, by blue, I have seen them die and be buried, then rise again in dreadful life-in-death. Do not laugh, *Monsieur;* I tell you that which I have seen.

"But regard me carefully: I did not say the symptoms were the same; I said that they were similar. Those little, so small wounds the patients show, those little wounds which you think unimportant, may be the key to this whole mystery. One thing disturbs me when I think of them. They are punctured, not perforated, by which I mean they strike down in the flesh but do not wholly pierce it. They have entrances but no exits. Also their form convinces me that they were made with knives or needles or some small cutting instrument, and not by teeth, as I at first suspected——"

"Teeth!" Traherne exploded in amazement. "D'ye mean to tell me you suspected someone had bitten them?"

"Some one—or some *thing,*" the Frenchman answered earnestly. "Now I think the contrary, therefore I am greatly puzzled.

"Come, my friend, when doctors quarrel patients die; let us not be stubborn. I will forego the garlic in the sickroom, for a time, at least; also I shall not insist upon their sleeping with their windows closed. Do you, for your part, seek for trusty nurses who shall watch them day and night, and we shall watch them closely, too. Do you agree?"

They shook hands upon their mutual understanding.

But the patients failed to show improvement. Sorensen seemed to grow no weaker, but his strength did not return, while within a week his niece became so utterly exhausted that the mere performance of the vital functions seemed to put too great a tax upon her waning strength. Saline infusions, finally liberal blood transfusions, were resorted to, and while these gave her temporary help, she soon lapsed back to semi-coma.

De Grandin and Traherne were desperate. "Trowbridge, *mon vieux,*" the Frenchman told me, "there is something evil here. We have exhausted every remedy of science. Now I am convinced our treatment must pursue another pattern. Will you watch with us tonight?"

We chose the upstairs sitting-room for our headquarters. Sorensen's room lay a dozen steps beyond it to the right, his niece's was scarcely farther at the left, and we could reach either or both in twenty seconds. We made inspections of the patients every hour, and each succeeding visit heightened our morale, for both seemed resting easily, and each time the nurses reported they had shown no sign of restlessness.

"*Mordieu,* but it would seem whatever lies behind this thing knows we are here, and holds its hand in fear," de Grandin told us as the tall clock in the lower hall struck two. "This is the time when vitality is lowest, and accordingly——"

His words were broken by a strangling, choking cry which echoed through the darkened house. "Monsieur Sorensen!" he exclaimed as, with Traherne and me at his heels, he leaped across the threshold of the sitting-room and raced the little distance to Sorensen's room.

The room, which had been dimly lighted by a night lamp, was dark as Erebus, and when we found the switch

and pressed it, a sharp metallic click, but no light, followed.

"Dieu de Dieu de Dieu de Dieu de Dieu!" de Grandin swore. "Ten thousand small blue devils! What has happened to the lights in this infernal place?"

A rasping, gurgling sound, as of water gushing down a drain, or a man fighting desperately for breath, came through the darkness from Sorensen's bed, and with a string of curses which would have shamed a stevedore, de Grandin groped his way across the room, snatched a pocket flashlight from his pocket and played its beam upon the sick man.

Sorensen lay upon his bed, his bedclothes kicked to the floor, hands clenched in a rigidity like that of death, fingers digging deep into the mattress. His pajama coat was open at the throat, and on the white skin of his neck, just below the line of tan, was a ruby disk where warm blood welled up from a tiny wound. His eyes were open, staring, wide, and on his sun-burned face was such a look of mortal terror as is seldom seen outside the fantasies of a nightmare.

"Mademoiselle!" de Grandin challenged sharply. "Where in blazing hell's accursed name is that *sacrée garde-malade?"* His flashlight swung around, picking up successive objects in the sick-room, coming finally to rest upon the rocking-chair where sat Sorensen's night nurse.

A chilling sense of cold, as though a freezing wind had blown upon me, made me catch my breath as the flashlight's gleam illumined her. She did not stir. She sat there rigidly, as though she had been carven out of wood. Her head was held uncomfortably downward, as though she listened to something far away; her neck was fixed and firm as though she had been in a trance. She was, to all intents, turned to stone. There was no special look upon her face, no fear, no terror; nothing that might be expected of a woman in her plight, but she sat fixed, immovable, utterly unconscious of the world about her.

"Mademoiselle!" de Grandin cried again.

His hand upon her shoulder brought her back to instant consciousness, and she rose quickly, winking in the strong light of his pocket torch.

"W-why, what's happened?" she demanded.

"Happened?" Doctor Traherne almost shouted. "What's happened? Nothing, only your patient almost died while you sat dozing in your chair!"

"I haven't been asleep," the girl denied vehemently. "Marshall brought me coffee a few minutes ago, and I drank a little, but just as I put the cup down you came shouting here, and——"

"Softly, *mes amis,"* de Grandin bade, holding up his hand for silence. "Do not chide her, Friend Traherne, she is not culpable. And you, *Mademoiselle,* what of the coffee which the little black one brought you? Where is it, if you please?"

"Here," she answered, pointing to a half-filled cup upon the table by her chair.

He picked the little vessel up, smelled it cautiously, then, dipping the tip of his forefinger into the brown liquid, put it to his tongue. *"Mais non,"* he shook his head in disappointment; then, to the girl:

"You say the negro butler brought you this?"

"Yes, sir; he's very thoughtful. He brings me coffee every night about this time."

"U'm, one wonders. Let us have a talk with him."

He strode across the darkened room and gave the call-bell button a sharp push.

WHILE we waited for the servant to arrive we made a quick examination of the lights. All were in working order, but each bulb had been twisted in its socket until it just missed contact with the feed line, making the switch entirely useless. *"Parbleu,* it seems there has been business of the monkey here," de Grandin told us as he screwed the bulbs in place. "Now, if we can but——"

"You rang, sir?" asked the colored butler, appearing at the bedroom door as silently as a disembodied spirit from the mists of limbo.

"Emphatically," the Frenchman said. "You brought coffee to the nurse a little time ago?"

"Yes, sir," the black answered, and I thought I caught the sparkle of sardonic humor in his eye. "I bring coffee to both Miss Tuthill and Miss Angevine about this time each night."

"Eh, and drug it, one surmises?" snapped de Grandin.

The servant turned to the nurse, his manner a curious compound of respect and insolence. "How much coffee did you drink, Miss Tuthill?" he asked.

"Not more than half a cup," she answered.

"And is this the cup?"

"Yes."

"Ah," his impudence was superb as he reached out his hand, took up the half-filled cup and drained it at a gulp.

He looked the little Frenchman in the eye, a smile of half-concealed amusement on his face. "If the coffee is drugged, as you suspect, it surely ought to act on me —sir," he announced, just enough pause between the statement and the title of respect to give his words a tone of insolent bravado.

"Sit down, my little one," de Grandin answered with surprizing calmness. "We shall see what we shall see anon." He bent above Sorensen, bandaging his wounded throat. "By the way," he flung across his shoulder casually, "you are not American, are you?"

"No, sir," said the butler.

"No? Where is it you were born, then?"

"Barbados, sir."

"U'm? Very well. I apologize if I have accused you wrongfully. That will be all, at present."

INSPECTION of Joyce Sorensen's room showed the girl sleeping peacefully and the nurse alertly wakeful. "Have you had your coffee yet, *Mademoiselle?"* de Grandin asked.

"No," Miss Angevine replied. "Marshall hasn't brought it yet. I wish he'd hurry, it helps a lot."

The little Frenchman gazed at her reflectively a moment; then: *"Mademoiselle,"* he ordered, "I desire that you join Miss Tuthill in Monsieur Sorensen's room. He is decidedly unimproved, and it is best that both of you stay with him. I shall undertake to watch your patient."

"What——" I began, but his upraised hand checked my question.

"Quickly, my friend," he bade, "behind the lounge!"

"Eh? Behind——"

"Species of an artichoke, conceal yourself with speed, and if you would not die in great discomfort, be sure you make no sound or move which might betray your presence. Me, I shall be the bait, you the silent spectator." He crossed the room and rang the bell; then, as he resumed his seat beside the sick girl's bed: "Remember," he repeated, "on no account

are you to move until I give the signal, no matter how great you deem the provocation."

"You rang, sir?" Marshall asked, appearing in the doorway with his silent, ghost-like tread.

"Yes, I should like a cup of coffee, if you please. The nurse is feeling indisposed, and I have taken her responsibility."

Something like a gleam of triumph flickered in the little black man's eyes, but it died as quickly as it came, and with a murmured, "Very good, sir," he vanished in the darkness of the hall.

Five minutes later he returned with a silver tray containing coffee-pot and cup.

De Grandin rose and strode across the room, pausing beside the bed and gazing thoughtfully at the sleeping girl. His back was toward the servant; the opportunity to drug his coffee was perfect, made to order, it appeared to me.

But nothing untoward happened. The butler placed the tray upon the table, stood demurely waiting further orders, then, as de Grandin failed to turn, withdrew with his usual silent tread.

Ignoring my presence completely, the Frenchman resumed his chair, drank his coffee at a draft, and picked up a magazine.

Eight, ten, a dozen minutes passed. Nothing happened. Then suddenly the tomb-like quiet of the room was broken by a gentle guttural sound. I looked out from my ambuscade in fascinated horror. De Grandin's head had fallen forward, the magazine had slipped down to the floor. He was asleep—and snoring.

About to leave my place and seize him by the shoulder, I felt, rather than heard, the butler's quick approach, and hastily retreated to my hiding-place.

Stepping softly as a cat, the servant came into the room, bearing a tray with pot and cup exactly duplicating those which stood upon the table at de Grandin's side. Quickly he exchanged the new utensils for the old, poured out a half-cup of fresh coffee, and arranged the things so carefully that, had I not observed the substitution, I should have been prepared to swear that the cup upon the table was the one from which de Grandin had refreshed himself.

These preliminaries finished, the fellow bent and looked into de Grandin's face; then, satisfied the Frenchman was asleep, he turned and tiptoed to the bed where Joyce Sorensen lay. For a moment he stood looking at her and a smile of wicked malice flickered on his features.

"Broken heart for broken heart, wasted life for wasted life, tears for tears and blood for blood," he murmured. "Thus shall Mamba be avenged."

Drawing a short, wide-bladed knife from underneath his jacket he ripped the girl's silk sleeping-robe from neck to hem with a single quick slash.

There was something devilish in his deftness. Bending close, he drew apart the lips of the slit robe, and gently blew upon the girl's white body. Locked in the thrall of deep, exhaustive sleep, she flinched from the current of his breath, turning slightly from him, and as she did so he tweaked the silk robe gently, pulling an inch or so of it from underneath her. Again and again he repeated the maneuver, slowly, patiently forcing her across the bed, bit by little bit withdrawing the nightrobe, till at last she had shed the garment utterly and lay there like a lovely statue hewn from ivory.

I saw a spot of bright blood form and grow as he pierced the skin below her left breast with the sharp point of his knife, and had flexed my muscles for a spring when his next move struck me stone-still with amazement.

From beneath his jacket he drew forth something like a bundle of coarse moss, dangled it before him from a silken cord and began to swing it through the air. Faster and faster, till it whirled round his head like a wheel of light, he swung the odd-appearing thing; then, as he reduced its speed and dangled it above the blood-spot on the girl's bared breast, I saw that closely twisted tendrils had worked open, and assumed the form of two capital Ys joined together at the base. Leaning quickly downward he dropped the object on the red-dyed wound which jeweled the whiteness of the girl's uncovered breast, and my eyes almost started from my head in horror as I saw the tiny thing begin to show a dreadful sort of change.

One of the branches of the lower Y had touched the drop of ruby blood which welled up from the tiny wound he had inflicted on Joyce Sorensen, and like a blotter—or a leech—it drank the ruddy fluid up, slowly swelling, growing, taking on the form of life. Like a tiny balloon, inflated by a gentle flow of breath, the shriveled Y-bars filled out gradually, took on the form of human arms and legs; a head appeared between the outspread branches of the upper Y, and, balanced like a ballet dancer on one toe, a small, black human form pirouetted over Joyce Sorensen's heart.

Strangely life-like, oddly human in form it was, yet with something of the plant about it, too, so that as I gazed in fascination I could not determine whether it was a minute black dwarf which resembled some obscene variety of flower, or some dreadful flower which presented an indecent parody of humanity.

THE sleeping girl stirred distressfully, moaning as if in torment, and her hands twitched spasmodically. It seemed as though the dancing horror balanced over her were forcing realization of its presence down through her unconsciousness.

"Trowbridge, *mon vieux,* take him, seize him, do not let him pass!" With a bound de Grandin was out of his chair, every trace of sleep gone from him. He leaped across the room, hands outstretched to seize the black.

With a snarl of bestial fury the little fellow dodged, hurling himself toward the door. I squirmed from my concealment and put myself in his path. As he ran straight at me I let drive my fist, catching him squarely on the point of the jaw and knocking him backward to de Grandin's waiting arms.

"Bête, chien, chameau!" the Frenchman whispered fiercely as he seized the undersized man's elbows in an iron grip and forced them to his sides. He slipped his hands down the butler's forearms, gripped him by the wrists and bent his arms upward in a double hammerlock. "Thou species of a spider, thou ninety-nine-times-damned example of a dead and rotten fish, take that flower of hell from *Mademoiselle,* and see that not a root is left to fester in her wound!" he ordered.

The little black man snarled like a trapped cat. "You think that you can make me?" he demanded. "Kill me, French oppressor, cut me in pieces, break my arms and drag my heart from out my breast, but you cannot save the woman. Tomorrow they will find her as she lies, unclothed for all to look on, bloodless and breathless——"

De Grandin bent the speaker's twisted arms a half-inch nearer to his shoulders. "You think so?" he demanded. *"Par les plumes d'un coq,* we shall see if you are right!"

Tiny gouts of perspiration glistened on

the little black man's forehead, his mouth drew taut with agony and his eyes thrust forward in their sockets like a frog's as de Grandin slowly tightened his torturing grip upon his arms. Step by step he forced his prisoner toward the bed, hissing epithets in mingled French and English in his ear.

As they reached the couch where Joyce Sorensen lay, the captive dropped upon his knees with a short gasp of anguish.

"Let me go," he begged. "Let me go, you French beast. I'll take the flower off of her."

De Grandin eased his grip upon one arm. "Do it with one hand," he ordered. "I need both."

The Frenchman twisted the bent arms again and the butler crumpled to the floor unconscious.

"Water, if you please, Friend Trowbridge," he commanded. "I am too fully occupied to get it."

I snatched a carafe from the table and dashed a glassful of chilled water in the prisoner's face.

"And now, my little truant out of hell," de Grandin whispered softly as the captive winced beneath the shock of the cold liquid and his eyelids fluttered upward, "you will please remove that thirty-thousand-times-accursed thing from *Mademoiselle,* or I shall surely twist your arms from off your body and thrust them piecemeal down your throat!" Once again he bent his prisoner's arms until I thought that he would surely crack the bones.

One wrist freed, the black man reached out, seized the gyrating black thing and lifted it carefully from the wound in Joyce Sorensen's breast. Like a blown-up bladder punctured with a pin, the infernal thing began to wilt immediately. In thirty seconds it had shrunk to half its former size; before a minute passed it had shriveled in upon itself, and was nothing but a ball of moss-like fiber from the fraying ends of which there dripped small drops of ruddy moisture.

"Bien," announced de Grandin as he eased his hold upon his prize. "Trowbridge, my friend, go and bid the nurse return, if you will be so kind. Me, I have a few important questions I would ask of this one—and I think I shall elicit better answers if I ask them in the privacy of the garage. I shall rejoin you soon."

"*HOLA, mes enfants!*" smiling in complete self-approval, Jules de Grandin joined us in Sorensen's upstairs sitting-room. "The germ which caused this new disease our colleague Traherne found has been isolated. *Morbleu,* he is completely isolated in the *poste de police* —unless they put him in restraint in the hospital. I fear I was a trifle rough with him before his story was completed."

"Then it was a germ disease——" Traherne began, but de Grandin interrupted with a laugh.

"Mais oui, mon brave," he chuckled. "A small and wholly vicious germ which traveled on two legs, and bore with him the strangest orchid any botanist could dream of. Attend me, if you please:

"When Monsieur Sorensen told us of his Madagascan interlude, I thought I smelled the odor of the rat. Madagascar, *mon Dieu,* what a place! A land of mystery more terrible than Africa, more subtle than China, more vengeful than India! When our forces overthrew the native government there in 1896 they incurred the never-dying hatred of the Andriana, or Malagasy nobility, and that hatred still crops up in strange and inexplicable murders of the French officials.

"You will recall Monsieur Sorensen referred to his native wife as Mamba, and called her a priestess of 'the Fragrant One'? Very good. Mamba, my friends,

is a native term for a terrible, strange black orchid said to infest the jungles of inland Madagascar. It is supposed to be a kind of vampire plant, or vegetable leech, and if it be placed upon an open wound it blossoms in the likeness of a human figure and nourishes itself upon the blood of its unfortunate host till he or she is dead. According to the stories I was told in Madagascar, the habitat of this strange plant is strictly guarded by the priesthood which serves 'the Fragrant One,' which is the native name for the more or less mythical man-eating tree of which such dreadful tales are told.

"Very well. What had we before us? A man who had incurred the hatred of a native noblewoman who was also a priestess of a dark, malevolent religion, a noted sorceress, a woman whose very name was identical with that of a strange and dreadful kind of parasitic plant. This man lived beneath a curse pronounced upon him by this woman, and in the curse she foretold that he should be stricken with a malady which should cause his blood to waste away like little brooks in summer. Also that before he died he should see the one whom he loved most slowly wilt away and die.

"And what else did we see? This man was wasting steadily away; his niece, the apple of his eye, was also sinking rapidly. Was it not apparent that the curse had found him out? It seemed entirely possible.

"But if it were a curse which worked by magic, why had he grown better when you sent him off upon a cruise? And why did his malady return when he came home? Apparently, there was some connection between his house and his disease. What was this link? Ah, that was for me to find out.

"I have seen men die when stricken by a vampire—do not laugh, Monsieur Traherne, I tell you it is so!—but the vampire bites his victim on the throat; Monsieur Sorensen's wound was from a knife or pin, not from a tooth, and a similar wound was on his niece's breast.

"I looked around, I noticed things; it is a habit which I have.

"I saw this colored butler, Marshall. This Marshall is a black man, but he is not a Negro. Neither are the Malagasy. When they are pure-bloods, unmixed with Malay or Chinese or Hindoo stock, their skin is black, but their features are small and straight and fine-cut, without a negroid trace, their hair straight and uncurled, their bodies firmly made, but small.

"Again, this Marshall, as he called himself, spoke with an English accent. I knew he was not reared in this country, but when he said he was from Barbados I also knew he lied. Negroes from Jamaica speak like Englishmen; those from Barbados, for some strange reason, speak with a strong Irish brogue. 'There is the smell of fish upon this business, Jules de Grandin,' I inform me.

"Tonight we find Miss Tuthill drugged; it is apparent, yet the butler offers a good alibi. 'I will test him further,' I decide, and so I send the other nurse away, ask him for coffee and pretend to fall into a drug-caused sleep. He rises to the bait. *Mon Dieu,* he rises nobly! He——"

"How did you manage to shake off the effects of the drug so quickly?" I interposed. "The nurse was absolutely paralyzed, yet you——"

"Tiens," he broke in with a laugh, "those who would make the fool of Jules de Grandin need to rise early in the day, my friend. Did you think I drank that coffee? *Quelle naiveté! Pah. Regardez!"*

From his pocket he drew out a handkerchief, soaking with brown stickiness.

"When one knows how, the trick is simple," he assured us. *"Le mouchoir,* I

stuff him in my collar underneath my chin while my back is turned to Marshall, then *pouf!* I pour the coffee into him when I pretend to drink. *Ah bah,* it is hot, it is sticky, it is most damnably uncomfortable, but it leaves me in possession of my faculties. Yes, certainly; of course.

"Then, while he thinks I am asleep he does the thing he has done many times before, but tonight would have been the curtain for Mademoiselle Joyce. He was prepared to break Monsieur Sorensen's heart by killing his niece before administering the *coup de grâce* to him.

"*Ha,* but I slept the sleep of the pussy-cat, me! When my small, black mouse was too far from his hole to make retreat I pounced upon him with the help of good friend Trowbridge, and thereafter he had many troubles.

"It took persuasion to make him tell his story, but he finally told it, though he finished with a broken arm. He was a nephew of this Mamba, this sorceress, this priestess of 'the Fragrant One,' this orchid-woman who had put a curse on Monsieur Sorensen. Through the years he watched his opportunity, finally coming to this country, taking service with Sorensen, gaining his full confidence, waiting for his chance to plant the strange, black orchid on his throat.

" 'You shall feel the kiss of Mamba,' said the Malagasy woman, and it was in truth the kiss of Mamba—Mamba the black orchid, not Mamba the black woman—which had drained him of his blood and almost caused his death when you called us in the case, Monsieur Traherne."

"Where's that black orchid now?" asked Traherne.

"It was not safe to have around. I threw it in the furnace—*morbleu,* it writhed and twisted like a tortured living thing when the flames devoured it!" answered Jules de Grandin with a grimace. "The memory of it nauseates me. Await me here, my friends, I go for medicine."

"I've some tablets in my bag——" Traherne began, but de Grandin made a gesture of dissent.

"Not that, *mon brave,*" he interrupted. "The medicine I seek is in a bottle on the sideboard down below. It bears the name of Messieurs Haig & Haig."

"Had Anthony given Susette that over-dose of chloral—given it purposely?"

The House Party at Smoky Island

By L. M. MONTGOMERY

A quaint little ghost story by the author of "Anne of Green Gables"

WHEN Madeline Stanwyck asked me to join her house party at Smoky Island I was not at first disposed to do so. It was too early in the season, and there would be mosquitoes. One mosquito can keep me more awake than a bad conscience: and there are millions of mosquitoes in Muskoka.

"No, no, the season for them is over," Madeline assured me. Madeline would say anything to get her way.

"The mosquito season is never over in Muskoka," I said, as grumpily as anyone could speak to Madeline. "They thrive up there at zero. And even if by some miracle there are no mosquitoes, I've no hankering to be chewed to pieces by black flies."

Even Madeline did not dare to say there would be no black flies, so she wisely fell back on her Madelinity.

"Please come, for my sake," she said wistfully. "It wouldn't be a real party for me if you weren't there, Jim darling."

I am Madeline's favorite cousin, twenty years her senior, and she calls everybody darling when she wants to get something out of him. Not but that Madeline . . . but this story is not about Madeline. It is about an occurrence which took place at Smoky Island. None of us pretends to understand it, except the Judge, who pretends to understand everything. But he really understands it no better than the rest of us. His latest explanation is that we were all hypnotized and in the state of hypnosis saw and remembered things we couldn't otherwise have seen or remembered. But even he cannot explain who or what hypnotized us.

I decided to yield, but not all at once.

"Has your Smoky Island housekeeper still got that detestable white parrot?" I asked.

"Yes, but it is much better-mannered than it used to be," assured Madeline. "And you know you have always liked her cat."

"Who'll be in your party? I'm rather finicky as to the company I keep."

Madeline grinned.

"You know I never invite anyone but interesting people to my parties"—I bowed to the implied compliment—"with a dull one or two to show off the sparkle of the rest of us"—I did not bow this time—"Consuelo Anderson . . . Aunt Alma . . . Professor Tennant and his wife . . . Dick Lane . . . Tod Newman . . . Senator Malcolm and Mrs. Senator . . . Old Nosey . . . Min Ingram . . . Judge Warden . . . Mary Harland . . . and a few Bright Young Things to amuse *me*."

I ran over the list in my mind, not disapprovingly. Consuelo was a very fat girl with a B. A. degree. I liked her because she could sit still for a longer time than any woman I know. Tennant was professor of something he called the New Pathology—an insignificant little man with a gigantic intellect. Dick Lane was one of those coming men who never seem to arrive, but a frank, friendly, charming fellow enough. Mary Harland was a comfortable spinster, Tod an amusing little fop, Aunt Alma a sweet, silvery-haired thing like a Whistler mother. Old Nosey—whose real name was Miss Alexander and who never let anyone forget that she had nearly sailed on the *Lusitania*—and the Malcolms had no terrors for me, although the Senator always called his wife "Kittens." And Judge Warden was an old crony of mine. I did not like Min Ingram, who had a rapier-like tongue, but she could be ignored, along with the Bright Young Things.

"Is that all?" I asked cautiously.

"Well . . . Doctor Armstrong and Brenda, of course," said Madeline, eyeing me as if it were not at all of course.

"Is that—wise?" I said slowly.

Madeline crumpled.

"Of course not," she said miserably. "It will likely spoil everything. But John insists on it . . . you know he and Anthony Armstrong have been pals all their lives. And Brenda and I have always been chummy. It would look so funny

if we didn't have them. I don't know what has got into her. We all *know* Anthony never poisoned Susette."

"Brenda doesn't know it, apparently," I said.

"Well, she ought to!" snapped Madeline. "As if Anthony could have poisoned anyone! But that's one of the reasons I particularly want you to come."

"Ah, now we're getting at it. But why *me?*"

"Because you've more influence over Brenda than anyone else . . . oh, yes, you have. If you could get her to open up . . . talk to her . . . you might help her. Because . . . if something doesn't help her soon she'll be beyond help. You know that."

I KNEW it well enough. The case of the Anthony Armstrongs was worrying us all. We saw a tragedy being enacted before our eyes and we could not lift a finger to help. For Brenda would not talk and Anthony had never talked.

The story, now five years old, was known to all of us, of course. Anthony's first wife had been Susette Wilder. Of the dead nothing but good; so I will say of Susette only that she was very beautiful and very rich. Luckily her fortune had come to her unexpectedly by the death of an aunt and cousin after she had married Anthony, so that he could not be accused of fortune-hunting. He had been wildly in love with Susette at first, but after they had been married a few years I don't think he had much affection left for her. None of the rest of us had ever had any to begin with. When word came back from California—where Anthony had taken her one winter for her nerves—that she was dead I don't suppose anyone felt any regret, nor any suspicion when we heard that she had died from an overdose of chloral; rather mysteriously, to be sure, for Susette was neither careless nor suicidally inclined. There were some ugly rumors, especially when it became known that Anthony had inherited her entire fortune under her will; but nobody ever dared say much openly. We, who knew and loved Anthony, never paid any heed to the hints. And when, two years later, he married Brenda Young, we were all glad. Anthony, we said, would have some real happiness now.

For a time he did have it. Nobody could doubt that he and Brenda were ecstatically happy. Brenda was a sincere, spiritual creature, lovely after a fashion totally different from Susette. Susette had had golden hair and eyes as cool and green as fluorspar. Brenda had slim, dark distinction, hair that blended with the dusk, and eyes so full of twilight that it was hard to say whether they were blue or gray. She loved Anthony so terribly that sometimes I thought she was tempting the gods.

Then—slowly, subtly, remorselessly—the change set in. We began to feel that there was something wrong—very wrong—between the Armstrongs. They were no longer quite so happy . . . they were not happy at all . . . they were wretched. Brenda's old delightful laugh was never heard, and Anthony went about his work with an air of abstraction that didn't please his patients. His practise had fallen off awhile before Susette's death, but it had picked up and grown wonderfully. Now it began dropping again. And the worst of it was that Anthony didn't seem to care. Of course he didn't need it from a financial point of view, but he had always been so keenly interested in his work.

I don't know whether it was merely surmise or whether Brenda had let a word slip, but we all knew or felt that a horrible suspicion possessed her. There was some whisper of an anonymous letter, full

of vile innuendoes, that had started the trouble. I never knew the rights of that, but I did know that Brenda had become a haunted woman.

Had Anthony given Susette that overdose of chloral—given it purposely?

If she had been the kind of woman who talks things out, some of us might have saved her. But she wasn't. It's my belief that she never said one word to Anthony of the cold horror of distrust that was poisoning her life. But he must have felt she suspected him, and between them was the chill and shadow of a thing that must not be spoken of.

At the time of Madeline's house party the state of affairs between the Armstrongs was such that Brenda had almost reached the breaking-point. Anthony's nerves were tense, too, and his eyes were almost as tragic as hers. We were all ready to hear that Brenda had left him or done something more desperate still. And nobody could do a thing to help, not even I, in spite of Madeline's foolish hopes. I couldn't go to Brenda and say, "Look here, you know, Anthony never thought of such a thing as poisoning Susette." After all, in spite of our surmises, the trouble might be something else altogether. And if she did suspect him, what proof could I offer her that would root the obsession out of her mind?

I HARDLY thought the Armstrongs would go to Smoky Island, but they did. When Anthony turned on the wharf and held out his hand to assist Brenda from the motor-boat, she ignored it, stepping swiftly off without any assistance and running up through the rock garden and the pointed firs. I saw Anthony go very white. I felt a little sick myself. If matters had come to such a pass that she shrank from his mere touch, disaster was near.

Smoky Island was in a little blue Muskoka lake and the house was called the Wigwam . . . probably because nothing on earth could be less like a wigwam. The Stanwyck money had made a wonderful place of it, but even the Stanwyck money could not buy fine weather. Madeline's party was a flop. It rained every day more or less for the week, and though we all tried heroically to make the best of things I don't think I ever spent a more unpleasant time. The parrot's manners were no better, in spite of Madeline's assurances. Min Ingram had brought an aloof, disdainful dog with her that everyone hated because he despised us all. Min herself kept passing out needle-like insults when she saw anyone in danger of being comfortable. I thought the Bright Young Things seemed to hold *me* responsible for the weather. All our nerves got edgy except Aunt Alma's. Nothing ever upset Aunt Alma. She prided herself a bit on that.

On Saturday the weather wound up with a regular downpour and a wind that rushed out of the black-green pines to lash the Wigwam and then rushed back like a maddened animal. The air was as full of torn, flying leaves as of rain, and the lake was a splutter of tossing waves. This charming day ended in a dank, streaming night.

And yet things had seemed a bit better than any day yet. Anthony was away. He had got some mysterious telegram just after breakfast, had taken the small motor-boat, and gone to the mainland. I was thankful, for I felt I could no longer endure seeing a man's soul tortured as his was. Brenda had kept her room all day on the good old plea of a headache. I won't say it wasn't a relief. We all felt the strain between her and Anthony like a tangible thing.

"Something—*something*—is going to happen," Madeline kept saying to me. She was really worse than the parrot.

After dinner we all gathered around the fireplace in the hall, where a cheerful fire of white birchwood was glowing; for although it was June the evening was cold. I settled back with a sigh of relief. After all, nothing lasted for ever, and this infernal house party would be over on Monday. Besides, it was really quite comfortable and cheerful here, despite rattling windows and wailing winds and rain-swept panes. Madeline turned out the electric lights, and the firelight was kind to the women, who all looked quite charming. Some of the Bright Young Things sat cross-legged on the floor with arms around one another quite indiscriminately as far as sex was concerned . . . except one languid, sophisticated creature in orange velvet and long amber ear-rings, who sat on a low stool with a lapful of silken housekeeper's cat, giving everyone an excellent view of the bones in her spine. Min's dog posed haughtily on the rug, and the parrot in his cage was quiet—for him—only telling us once in a while that he or someone else was devilish clever. Mrs. Howey, the housekeeper, insisted on keeping him in the hall, and Madeline had to wink at it because it was hard to get a housekeeper in Muskoka even for a Wigwam.

The Judge was looking like a chuckle because he had solved a jigsaw puzzle that had baffled everyone, and the Professor and Senator, who had been arguing stormily all day, were basking in each other's regard for a foeman worthy of his steel. Consuelo was sitting still, as usual. Mrs. Tennant and Aunt Alma were knitting pullovers. Kittens, her fat hands folded across her satin stomach, was surveying her Senator adoringly, and Miss Nosey was taking everything in. We were, for the time being, a contented, congenial bunch of people and I did not see why Madeline should have suddenly proposed that each of us tell a ghost story, but she did. It was an ideal night for ghost stories, she averred. She hadn't heard any for ages and she understood that everybody had had at least one supernatural occurrence in his or her life.

"I haven't," growled the Judge contemptuously.

"I suppose," said Professor Tennant a little belligerently, "that you would call anyone an ass who believed in ghosts?"

The Judge carefully fitted his fingertips together before he replied.

"Oh, dear, no. I would not so insult asses."

"Of course if you don't *believe* in ghosts they can't happen," said Consuelo.

"Some people are able to see ghosts and some are not," announced Dick Lane. "It's simply a gift."

"A gift I was not dowered with," said Kittens complacently.

Mary Harland shuddered. "What a dreadful thing it would be if the dead really came back!"

" 'From ghoulies and ghaisties and lang-legged beasties
And things that go bump in the night
Good Lord, deliver us,' " quoted Ted flippantly.

But Madeline was not to be sidetracked. Her little elfish face, under its crown of russet hair, was alive with determination.

"We're going to spook a bit," she said resolutely. "This is just the sort of night for ghosts to walk. Only of course they can't walk here because the Wigwam isn't haunted, I'm sorry to say. Wouldn't it be heavenly to live in a haunted house? Come now, everyone must tell a ghost story. Professor Tennant, you lead off. Something nice and creepy, please."

To my surprize, the Professor did lead off, although Mrs. Tennant's expression plainly informed us that she didn't approve of juggling with ghosts. He told a

very good story, too—punctuated with snorts from the Judge—about a house he knew which had been haunted by the voice of a dead child who joined in every conversation bitterly and vindictively. The child had, of course, been ill-treated and murdered, and its body was eventually found under the hearthstone of the library. Then Dick told a tale about a dead dog that avenged its master, and Consuelo amazed me by spinning a really gruesome yarn of a ghost who came to the wedding of her lover with her rival . . . Consuelo said she knew the people. Ted knew a house in which you heard voices and footfalls where no voices or footfalls could be, and even Aunt Alma told of "a white lady with a cold hand" who asked you to dance with her. If you were reckless enough to accept the invitation you never lost the feeling of her cold hand in yours. This chilly apparition was always garbed in the costume of the Seventies.

"Fancy a ghost in a crinoline," giggled a Bright Young Thing.

Min Ingram, of all people, had seen a ghost and took it quite seriously.

"Well, show me a ghost and I'll believe in it," said the Judge, with another snort.

"Isn't he devilish clever?" croaked the parrot.

Just at this point Brenda drifted downstairs and sat down behind us all, her tragic eyes burning out of her white face. I had a feeling that there, in that calm, untroubled scene, full of good-humored, tolerably amused, commonplace people, a human heart was burning at the stake in agony.

SOMETHING fell over us with Brenda's coming. Min Ingram's dog suddenly whined and flattened himself out on the rug. It occurred to me that it was the first time I had ever seen him looking like a real dog. I wondered idly what had frightened him. The housekeeper's cat sat up, its back bristling, slid from the orange velvet lap and slunk out of the hall. I had a queer sensation in the roots of what hair I had left, so I turned hastily to the slim, dark girl on the oak settle at my right.

"You haven't told us a ghost story yet, Christine. It's your turn."

Christine smiled. I saw the Judge looking admiringly at her ankles, sheathed in chiffon hose. The Judge always had an eye for a pretty ankle. As for me, I was wondering why I couldn't recall Christine's last name and why I felt as if I had been impelled in some odd way to make that commonplace remark to her.

"Do you remember how firmly Aunt Elizabeth believed in ghosts?" said Christine. "And how angry it used to make her when I laughed at the idea? I am . . . wiser now."

"I remember," said the Senator in a dreamy way.

"It was your Aunt Elizabeth's money that went to the first Mrs. Armstrong, wasn't it?" said one of the Bright Young Things, nicknamed Tweezers. It was an abominable thing for anyone to say, right there before Brenda. But nobody seemed horrified. I had another odd feeling that it *had* to be said and who but Tweezers would say it? I had another feeling . . . that ever since Brenda's entrance every trifle was important, every tone was of profound significance, every word had a hidden meaning. Was I developing nerves?

"Yes," said Christine evenly.

"Do you suppose Susette Armstrong really took that overdose of chloral on purpose?" went on Tweezers unbelievably.

Not being near enough to Tweezers to

assassinate her, I looked at Brenda. But Brenda gave no sign of having heard. She was staring fixedly at Christine.

"No," said Christine. I wondered how she knew, but there was no question whatsoever in my mind that she did know it. She spoke as one having authority. "Susette had no intention of dying. And yet she was doomed, although she never suspected it. She had an incurable disease which would have killed her in a few months. Nobody knew that except Anthony and me. And she had come to hate Anthony so. She was going to change her will the very next day—leave everything away from him. She told me so. I was furious. Anthony, who had spent his life doing good to suffering creatures, was to be left poor and struggling again, after his practise had been all shot to pieces by Susette's goings-on. I had loved Anthony ever since I had known him. He didn't know it—but Susette did. Trust her for that. She used to twit me with it. Not that it mattered . . . I knew he would never care for me. But I saw my chance to do something for him and I took it. *I* gave Susette that overdose of chloral. I loved him enough for that . . . and for *this*."

Somebody screamed. I have never known whether it was Brenda or not. Aunt Alma—who was never upset over anything—was huddled in her chair in hysterics. Kittens, her fat figure shaking, was clinging to her Senator, whose foolish, amiable face was gray—absolutely gray. Min Ingram was on her knees and the Judge was trying to keep his hands from shaking by clenching them together. His lips were moving and I know I caught the word, "God." As for Tweezers and all the rest of her gang, they were no longer Bright Young Things but simply shivering, terrified children.

I felt sick—very, very sick. *Because there was no one on the oak settle and none of us had ever known or heard of the girl I had called Christine.*

At that moment the hall door opened and a dripping Anthony entered. Brenda flung herself hungrily against him, wet as he was.

"Anthony . . . Anthony, forgive me," she sobbed.

Something good to see came into Anthony's worn face.

"Have you been frightened, darling?" he said tenderly. "I'm sorry I was so late. There was really no danger. I waited to get an answer to my wire to Los Angeles. You see I got word this morning that Christine Latham had been killed in a motor accident yesterday evening. She was Susette's second cousin and nurse . . . a dear, loyal little thing. I was very fond of her. I'm sorry you've had such an anxious evening, sweetheart."

Once in a Thousand Years

By FRANCES BRAGG MIDDLETON

One of the strangest stories ever written—a fascinating present-day tale of Atlantis and a weird adventure in the Sargasso Sea

IT WAS a mad thing to do, of course. But the three of us were together, perhaps for the last time. And we were all just out of school, and none of us was twenty-two, and each of us had had one drink too many. Also, the night was one of those mad, intoxicating nights that rarely come more than once in any man's lifetime.

Glamor. The night was thick with it. A blue, blue, star-shot sky. The Gulf spread out to meet it, white under the breath-taking beauty of the great white moon. All the rippling, gurgling voices of a summer sea, all the Circe-scents of jasmine flowers, magnolias, and orange trees in bloom. We couldn't sleep. We couldn't stay inside.

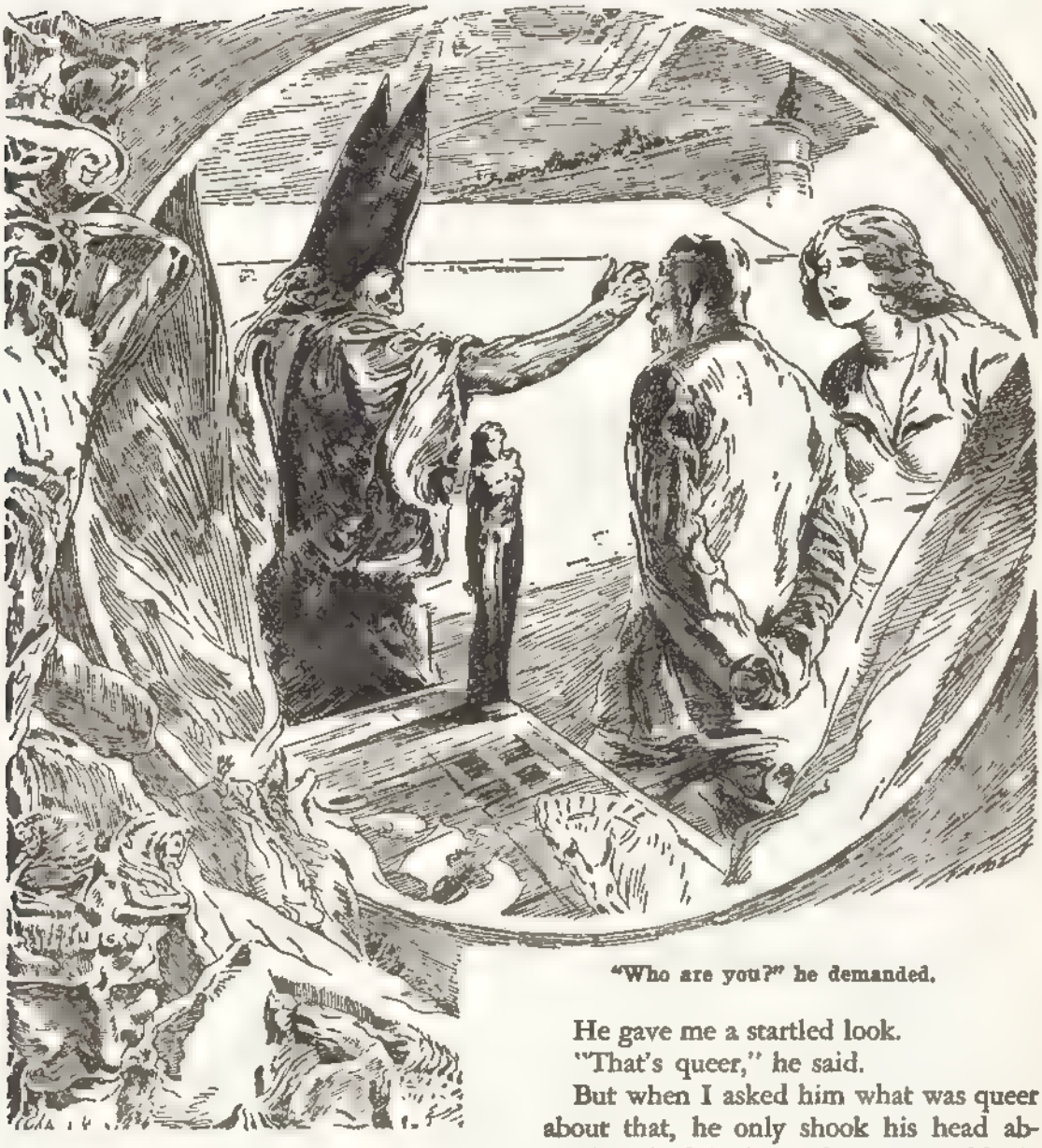
I don't remember who suggested swimming out to the float. We were none of us accountable, exactly. But I remember we all agreed to it, though we all knew that the tide was out and running strong. Indeed, I never knew such another ebb as we felt that night. It swept us out with all the force of the current of a great river in flood-time. And it served to sober us. We were glad to reach the float and lie on it and rest. We knew we could never go back against a tide like that. We'd have to wait till morning.

So Nelson Todd and I made the best of it and slept. But when the hot sun waked us, Shane O'Farrell was gone.

It did not occur to us then to be uneasy. We swam in, dressed, and went down to breakfast. It was only then, when we couldn't find him, and when Todd's family and Todd's servants—it was Todd's father's house where we were staying—declared they hadn't seen or heard him, that we began to be alarmed. And by that time it was too late to do any good.

Of course, we searched everywhere, notified his uncle and the authorities. There was a terrible rush and scramble of coast guards, police, and newspaper men for a while. It actually looked at one time as if Todd and I might be accused of making away with him. But O'Farrell's old uncle wouldn't hear of that. Neither would he admit that O'Farrell was dead. Todd and I had no doubts on that score. We knew what that tremendous ebb was like. If it had got O'Farrell . . . but it was more than three years before we knew.

For Shane O'Farrell came back, as suddenly, as unexpectedly, as he had gone. He simply walked in on me, in the office where I was strenuously trying to learn my father's business. And when I had begun to get over the shock of his return, and to get a good look at him, I began to realize that he had changed immeasurably. He had always been tall, I remembered. Now, by some trick in the carriage of his head, in the pitch of his shoulders, he seemed inches taller. His blue eyes were clouded with something I couldn't fathom. His big, generous, Irish mouth, that had used to laugh so much, was etched in sensitive, wistful lines. And his movements were more



"Who are you?" he demanded.

deliberate. His old impulsiveness was gone.

SHANE told me, in answer to my questions, that he had been globe-trotting a bit, that he had already seen his uncle, but hadn't been able to locate Nelson Todd.

"Todd's on an engineering job in Yucatan," I told him.

He gave me a startled look.

"That's queer," he said.

But when I asked him what was queer about that, he only shook his head absently. And it dawned on me suddenly that it was his own voice that was queer, as if it hadn't been used much lately, in talking English, that is.

I began to get a little warm under the collar. After all, we'd been brought up next door to each other, gone to school together, eaten each other's bread, fought each other's battles, spent each other's money, almost all our lives. He had dropped into the sea that night from

within a yard of me. And I wasn't going to be put off by that cool, detached, new manner of his, if I could help it.

"So you mean to tell me," I accused, "that you got tired of the float, so you just dropped off into the water, were swept out to sea and were picked up, and that you've just been wandering over the face of the earth ever since, without money, without letting your friends know——"

"Oh, I was with friends," he told me casually. "That is," with the manner of one conscientiously trying to tell the exact truth, "that is, they were friends after I met up with them."

And for a while he just sat there, staring out the window of that eighteenth-story office, but seeing nothing, hearing nothing, I could have sworn, of the dingy, humming streets below. And my patience broke all of a sudden, like a blown-up balloon.

"But where have you been?" I almost yelled at him. "Great Scott, man, do you think you can go out like the flame of a candle and then bob up again without a word of warning, and expect nobody to take any notice of it? Haven't the reporters got hold of you yet?"

"No," he answered mildly, still staring out toward the smoky horizon. "Uncle John and you are the only ones who know yet that I'm back. I don't want—publicity."

"Well, you'll get it," I exploded. "Dead men can't come alive without getting into the papers. Where have you been?"

"In the Sargasso Sea," he answered quietly, and smiled a little, secret smile.

I think I was never quite so angry in my life before.

"So that's what you mean to tell the papers!" I snorted witheringly. "I suppose that wouldn't get you publicity in large, handsome gobs? The Sargasso Sea that's so famous and so reeking with mystery! And you mean to tell me you got there—by swimming, was it?—with nothing but a pair of bathing-trunks to help you along?"

He burst out laughing, quite like his old self for the moment. It was the first sign of *reality* I'd seen in him since he came.

"Oh, I had a striped silk dressing-gown before I got there," he explained. But then his laugh broke off in the middle and his eyes grew vague again. "Saint Brandan's Isle, you know. You've read about it——"

"Sure," I snorted. "I've read about it. About the Seven Cities of Cibola, too, and the voyages of Madoc and Maeldune, and a thousand other marvels. But I never expect to see any of them, and you don't either."

"No, I never expect to see any of them," he repeated, and his eyes grew more clouded than ever.

I banged the drawers of my desk shut and dragged him out to lunch. That night I took him to a show. But he never really waked up. He still liked me, I think—as much, that is, as it was left in him to like anyone. He dropped in every day. But he wouldn't talk. And that queer, detached manner of his bothered me.

When he did break silence, it was always to say something strange and unexpected.

"Do you believe in the impossible?" he asked one night, when we were smoking in the living-room of the two-by-four apartment which was all I could afford in town.

"It depends on what you call the impossible," I answered, puzzled. "Columbus did it in his day. Peary did it in ours.

So did the Wright brothers. Everything was impossible till somebody did it."

"In other words," he said slowly, "nothing is really impossible?"

"Not after it's been done," I told him, with all the wisdom of twenty-five.

"Then if I told you——"

But he broke off there, and that absent look came into his eyes again. I admit I was worried about his sanity. His uncle was, too. I know, because he told me. But we didn't either of us know what we ought to do.

He grew more and more restless through the winter. He went to the public library almost every day and dug into a lot of what would have been called ungodly volumes not so very many years ago. Folklore. Old legends about Atlantis, Antillia, Lemuria. All he could lay his hands on about archeological research in Crete, Egypt, Mexico, Yucatan, a dozen other moldy civilizations. There was nobody to interfere with him. He had money enough, which his old uncle had carefully nursed along for him while he was gone. He didn't have to work. But it did seem a pity for him to throw his life away—as he seemed bent on doing.

And that word "impossible." It seemed to haunt him. He wanted to believe something, or to make me believe something. I got wise to that fact at last. I'd known for a long time that he must have stumbled on some discovery or other, probably remarkable, even epoch-making. He was eating his heart out about it too. He needed, desperately, to let it to the air. But it was a long time before I could get him to talk. And when he did start, it was just by bits and snatches. I had to piece them together myself. But when I did begin to get his drift I was eager enough for him to go on.

"Do you know anything about heredity?" he demanded once.

"Only that most people look more or less like their parents and inherit their debts or their property," I said.

"No, I mean——" He stopped, and it looked as if he was going off into one of those far-away silences again. But he didn't. "No, I mean the principles of heredity that make us what we are. A man doesn't always resemble his close kin. There are throwbacks sometimes. You take a case where two dissimilar breeds have been crossed, white man and Indian, say. No matter how carefully the alien blood is bred out, sooner or later a child will be born into that family who has all the marks of a full-blood Indian. Now such things do happen, not frequently, but often enough to establish a rule. How do *you* explain that?"

"I don't know that I ever tried," I told him. "But I suppose it was because the kid in question wasn't very choosy. Instead of taking his hair from grandddaddy Jones and his eyes from grandmother Smith and his short temper from great-great-grandfather Whosit, the cattle rustler, he just grabbed off all the characteristics of old Chief Rain-in-the-Face and let it go at that. I dare say such things happen oftener than we think. Where there is no mixture of races it isn't noticeable, but lots of times you hear people say, 'I declare I don't know who that child takes after, nobody in the family that *I* ever saw.' But what's the point, O'Farrell?"

"Just this," and his face was very intent and sober. "Suppose someone could inherit *all* his characteristics from just *one* ancestor, with nothing at all from any of the others—what then?"

"Why, then, probably, he'd be a monkey," I grinned. "At that, they're born

with tails sometimes, you know. You see it in the papers. And it probably happens sometimes, too, when it doesn't get into the papers."

"Yes, but"—O'Farrell was dead in earnest now—"but if he inherited everything from just one ancestor, all his characteristics of mind as well as body, then wouldn't he remember *all that that ancestor ever knew?*"

I was dumfounded, and uneasy. But I tried to hide my fears. I wanted to draw him out, if possible, get at the thing that was festering in his mind.

"You mean," I said slowly, feeling my way, "that you would explain in that way the queer feeling we have sometimes that we have lived before, that we can almost remember things which we know we never saw——"

"Exactly!" eagerly. "But if you had inherited *all* your brain from just one ancestor, then you'd remember clearly, wouldn't you? Don't you see that that *could* happen?"

"Oh, yes," I granted carelessly. "It might—once in a thousand years."

"Once in——" He stared at me, his face as white as paper. He looked so sick I ran and got him a drink. But he got over his agitation shortly. His color came back. "But that was only a guess you made," he finished, as if taking comfort in the thought.

"Of course, it was a guess," impatiently. "A guess just like yours."

"No, I'm in earnest," surprizingly.

But he wouldn't say anything more then. It was weeks before I got the rest of it. And even yet I doubt if I ever did get it all.

It seems that he couldn't sleep that night, out there on the float. That luminous, glamorous moonlight, the swiftly running ebb, all the scents and sounds and witchery about him wrought him up to a tremendous pitch. He said he just lay there repeating lines about the sea that had stuck in his mind from English Lit., especially from Swinburne and Tennyson—he'd dug in pretty deep, I remembered, that last year at the U. He quoted a lot of it. He said that night, for the first time so far as he was concerned, "The sea moaned round with many voices"—and he understood them all. That for the first time he could actually feel all "the light and sound and darkness of the sea." And at last he found himself repeating that thing of Masefield's:

> "Once in a hundred years the lemmings come
> Westward, in search of food, over the snow,
> Westward, until the salt sea drowns them dumb,
> Westward, till all are drowned, those lemmings go."

And then, he said, altogether without his own volition, he had slipped into the water, and the tide was racing with him out to sea. He wasn't drunk on liquor, I could swear to that myself. A glass too much, maybe, but not drunk. But the night had got him, the night and the ebbing tide and the moon that controlled the tide.

He said he wasn't worried at all. He exerted himself very little. The tide was carrying him. Even when he began to tire he wasn't actually alarmed. When he came in contact with some wooden thing that floated by him he pulled himself aboard without any particular feeling of eagerness or relief. The moon had paled by that time and the sun was not yet up; so he couldn't see much. He could hear a sort of drowsy chittering and squeaking, though, at the other end of the raft he was on, a noise that reminded him of mice. But he didn't investigate. He was tired. And, unbelievable as it sounds, he stretched out on the wet boards and slept.

The sun roused him to what, he assured me solemnly, was to be the most stupendous day of his life, up to that time. He found himself on a raft, all right, though he was sure it hadn't been built for that purpose. It looked more like the side of a heavily timbered house, a house that perhaps had been washed away and broken up in flood-time. It rode low in the sea, and shipped water constantly, enough to keep everything wet. O'Farrell didn't mind that especially, but his companions did.

For he wasn't alone. At the end of the raft farthest from him were clustered somewhat less than fifty little brown-furred animals with small ears and short tails and tiny, white, sharp teeth. They wrinkled their noses at him and made complaining noises and seemed very damp and unhappy. He supposed they were some sort of field mice, though they were a little large for that. They reminded him of prairie-dogs, he said.

He began now to be actively concerned about his own safety. There he was, well out of sight of land, aboard a makeshift raft which the most sanguine couldn't have called seaworthy, with no food unless you counted the field mice which he wasn't hungry enough to do yet, and no clothing but his bathing-trunks. Fortunately the sea was calm. Clumsy as it was, the raft rode levelly, driving as straight ahead as if by rule and compass. And when he looked overside he understood the reason. A current as strong as that strange ebb tide of the night before was sweeping it onward—a current where by rights no current ought to be—a current of purple-blue, transparent water that was less than fifty feet wide.

O'Farrell came cautiously upright in the center of the raft. As far as he could see ahead of him, that dark-colored current cut the gray Atlantic in two. And on its flood drifted boats of many sizes, of many designs, led, or so it seemed to him, by a stately yacht, white and misty in the distance, her sails all furled.

He simply couldn't believe what he saw. He looked and looked, but the scene remained unchanged — a plain sweep of sunlighted ocean, empty but for that weird, incredible procession.

He was hungry by noon. So were the field mice. They scampered about uneasily, chattering at him, beseeching him with their little bright eyes. He was thoroughly alarmed by this time, finally decided to signal the nearest craft. It was too far away for his voice to carry, but, caught in a splinter of the raft, there was a weather-stained strip of sodden canvas; so he used that to signal with.

The boat just ahead of him put about and drew slowly toward him, fighting that powerful current every foot of the way. O'Farrell said it was the trimmest gasoline launch he ever saw, fitted up with a high-powered engine, but still almost powerless against that inexorable current. Its only occupant was a girl. She threw him a line as she came alongside, and he made it fast to a splintered timber. And then he got the biggest shock of the day.

For the girl suddenly cried out in a voice that was high with ecstasy and amazement and incredulity all at once. She leaped to the raft, ran over to those shy, furry little creatures and went to her knees and held her hands out to them.

"Oh, the dear, dear, funny, timid little things," she cried, a sob in her throat. "And you brought them! You lucky, lucky man! We didn't know we had any of them along."

O'FARRELL said he just stood there, gaping at her, while the little field mice sniffed at her fingers and crept into

her hands. He had felt like a man in a dream ever since he waked, and now he felt more like one than ever. Even the girl was unlike anyone he had ever seen before. She was as tall as he was, very fair, yellow-haired, blue-eyed. But that doesn't mean much. It was her features, he said, the pure Greek lines like those of the old statues, the grace and swing of her perfect body, which he found impossible to describe. Even her white middy blouse and skirt, her white shoes and hose, couldn't keep her from making him think of the Winged Victory. But her voice, her accent, were, incredibly, as truly American as his own.

"Oh, it's wonderful, after all our years of dreams, to see them coming true!" she was murmuring. "I never thought I'd actually *travel* with them. Oh!" her voice rose on a note of purest music. "All our old dreams, changing into reality!"

O'Farrell was stupefied, she was so amazing, so utterly different from anyone he had ever known. And she was plainly so rapt with ecstasy, so absorbed in her happiness, so sure of being in the presence of an understanding and sympathetic listener, that she had thrown all reserve to the winds.

"You know how it begins," her soft voice was almost crooning. "Back in your childhood, when you first begin to remember that other world—when bit by bit you understand the destiny you were born to—when you first realize why it is that you love and long for the sea, though you never saw it in this life—why you yearn for a burning moon in place of the cold, pale moon you know, for the low, yellow stars instead of the far-off points of light you live under, for a sky of gorgeous blue instead of the dull sky up above you——"

She drew a deep, long sigh. The little furry things had taken complete possession of her now. They were as friendly with her, O'Farrell said, as kittens. It was pretty to watch her with them, or would have been if he hadn't been so completely bewildered by it.

"And you come upon pictures that make you ache with homesickness—you don't know why. Pictures of the sea—and long, smooth beaches of shining sand—and ships of long ago. Pictures of Greece, Crete, Spain, Philistia. And your half-dreams taunt and mock you, till at last, just all in a sudden flash of light, you *know*."

Her voice trailed off into contented silence. O'Farrell made no effort to break it. He couldn't think of a thing to say. And when she spoke again her tone had changed.

"Why, they're hungry!" she cried. "There is no food! Why did you bring no food along? Whatever in the world——"

"I didn't know I was coming," he told her bluntly. "This whole business"—he waved his hand toward the sea, the current, the parade of boats—"is no more than a nightmare to me. Maybe you can explain it?"

She sat back on her heels, staring at him in an amazement that matched his own. Her eyes were enormous in her suddenly pale face. She caught her breath sharply in a sudden rush of emotion, the nature of which he could not have told.

"But this is beyond a miracle," she cried. "If you aren't one of us—if you didn't hear the call—how could you come?"

He told her. She listened intently, nodding her head from time to time, slowly and thoughtfully. She looked squarely at him out of eyes that were the steadiest, the most candid that he had ever seen.

"But this is terrible," she told him

when he had finished. "I don't know what they'd do to you," with a sudden, apprehensive glance at the line of boats ahead. "You can't possibly escape, and if you don't even know where we are going——"

"I don't. It's the most impossible adventure any man ever dreamed about. Can you tell me? Do you know?"

"Oh, yes, I know." She smiled. "I am one of those who were born to know—by inheritance, rather than by learning. All of us," again that gesture toward the boats ahead, "are bound for the same place—to the kingdom of Atlas—the Garden of the Hesperides—the Isles of the Blest——"

She broke off, watching his face, which must, O'Farrell confessed, have seemed a mask of stupidity.

"Can't you even guess?" she cried.

But he could only shake his head.

"Do you mean," she asked him incredulously, "that you know nothing at all of that first great civilization from which all others spread—that land of tall, fair men—'for there were giants in those days'—which sent its adventurers into so many lands? Did you never hear of Cro-Magnon man, who left his drawings and his bones in the caves of France and Spain? Or the legends of the giants who lived once in the British Isles? Of the Pelasgians, the Cyclops, the Titans of Greece and Asia Minor? Of Hiawatha, who came to teach the savage Iroquois? Of Quetzalcoatl, the Fair God, who came to the Aztecs? Does the tale of the sunken land of Tristram's Lyonesse mean nothing at all to you?"

"Mighty little," O'Farrell admitted. "Either you're crazy or I am. I've read myths and folklore, of course, and as much of the *Morte d'Arthur* and its kindred 'literature' as they made me swallow. But it never occurred to me that I'd ever meet up with anybody who *believed* that stuff."

"But it isn't written—what *we* know," the girl said solemnly. "As for those legendary remnants of an ancient history that you mention—why, don't you realize that there never was a myth or a legend yet that did not have some foundation in fact?"

O'Farrell said he couldn't answer her. What with the hot sun on his head, the glare on the water, and no food for almost twenty-four hours, his head was going round and round. Perhaps the girl saw that. Anyhow she came deliberately upright, and the little animals she had been petting clustered around her, running over her feet.

"Did you ever see anyone just like me?" she demanded.

"No," O'Farrell muttered. "No."

"Yet all my people are like me. I don't mean the family I was born into. No. I mean my people"—she waved her hand—"there—in front of us." She looked at him, long and hard. "And you are not one of us. You know none of the things we know. That will be very bad for you, because you can not escape. And yet you might pass for one of us, being fair—and tall—though not quite tall enough. And you brought these"—she pointed to the little creatures at her feet.

"I don't want to see you made a sacrifice," she went on earnestly. "Maybe if I tell you—but first we must get aboard the launch. It isn't wet and sloppy like this thing, and I've plenty of food aboard."

SO THEY made the transfer, field mice and all. The launch was fairly comfortable, well stocked with eatables, cushions, summer blankets. The girl gave O'Farrell a lounging-robe of hers

and a complete man's yachting-outfit which she had worn in a college play. She had always played men's parts in the girls' plays, she said.

He went into the tiny cabin and tried them on. They fitted him—and O'Farrell was six feet tall! But she advised him to save the suit for the day of their "arrival", so he wore the lounging-robe instead.

It must have taken about a week, he reckons, to make that incredible journey. He lay on the deck most of the time, under the awning, trying to figure things out and not succeeding. He had no theory, no answer to the puzzle presented by that girl. She spent the nights in the little cabin, but all day she was outside, always in fresh, plain, white clothes, always as perfectly appointed as if she were actually chiseled of the marble she so resembled. And she was always coolly, impersonally friendly toward O'Farrell. But she showed actual tenderness toward those pets of hers.

She had told him her name the first day. Diana. That was all. It fitted her superbly, he thought.

They were evidently quite off the steamer lanes. They met no craft, sighted no land; till, early one morning, the hazy outlines of lofty hills stood blue against the sky.

"The Isle of Saint Brandan," the girl whispered softly. "Sailors used to sight it, but when they tried to reach it, it was never there."

"Is that where we are going?" O'Farrell wanted to know.

"That is where we are going. For *we* shall reach it—we and the lemmings. We were summoned, as others are summoned—once in a thousand years."

Lemmings! He understood now. Those lines of Masefield's went swimming through his head again, and he repeated them under his breath:

"Once, it is thought, there was a westward land,
(Now drowned) where there was food for those starved things,
And memory of the place has burnt its brand
In the little brains of all the lemming kings."

"Yes, it was there—the Greek Isles of the Blest—Odysseus sailed west to find them—and they still are there, only the land between is lost and drowned—lost and drowned as the poor little lemmings are, those who try to go when it is not the appointed time."

"Do you remember the last lines?" O'Farrell asked. "Listen!

"But now the land is drowned, yet still we press
Westward, in search, to death, to nothingness.

"Is that for us?"

"No, not for us. That is——"

And she sat there for a long time, her chin on her hand, watching the cloud-like hills on the far horizon. Yet it must have been by faith alone that she was so sure that the land was there. To O'Farrell it seemed much more like a mirage, a fantasmagoria, a fata morgana. The hills changed so, now like a low continuous range, now rearing in tall spire-like peaks, now resembling glaciers, icebergs, or ruined, battlemented castles. And as they drew nearer, the land seemed actually to divide, to break up precisely as a fleet might do, even to advance and recede in strange and complicated evolutions, while over it hung always a wavering mass of rainbow-colored mist.

"Do you wonder now," the girl asked him in a hushed, enraptured voice, "that the sailors used to tell such strange tales of Saint Brandan's Isle—how they sighted its green hillsides and its clear streams, and how it vanished like a mirage whenever they came near it?"

"I can remember one legend about a Portuguese who landed there," O'Farrell answered dryly. "The natives feast-

ed and wined him to the king's own taste. But when he awoke he was adrift alone on the ocean. And when he reached home he found his sweetheart had been dead a hundred years or so. They showed him her tomb, I remember, by her husband's, along with the tombs of her seven daughters and her seven sons. I wouldn't like that."

"That was only a myth," she objected.

"Haven't you said a hundred times that all myths have a foundation in fact?"

"Yes," reluctantly. "And it might have happened with him as it has happened with you. It is a miracle, of course. But miracles can happen—once in a thousand years."

"You mean, I suppose, that the summons—as you call it—comes just once in a thousand years?"

"Yes, that is what I mean."

"And what is to happen to us?"

For the first time, O'Farrell said, he saw trouble in her face. Her eyes, when they met his, were clouded, her fine mouth quivered.

"For myself there can be nothing but good," she answered. "But for you, who come by accident, I don't know. They will not like it. And it lingers in my mind, like some far-off recollection only half remembered, that they can be very cruel, at times."

"In the matter of human sacrifice, perhaps?"

She winced. Her breath came sharply.

"It used to be so," she admitted, unwillingly. "And I suppose they still offer sacrifices to their god of the sea—Poseidon. You know"—gently—"the Mayas of Central America did that too; only, being an inland people, they had to throw their sacrifice into an artificial pool. They had had their messenger, too, just as the Aztecs and the Iroquois had, from Atlantis."

"Atlantis!" But he realized that he wasn't really surprized.

"Atlantis, which was never completely destroyed, which still exists in the Sargasso Sea, a country so completely governed by science that its people can always avoid their enemies, so never have to fight them."

"So that tale Plato told of the Atlanteans attacking Athens is substantially true?"

"Of course. And if you want to live, you must believe as I believe, and seem to remember as I remember. For if you show doubt or ignorance, I am afraid you'll die."

And then, O'Farrell said, she talked to him a long time, carefully going over and elaborating all she had told him—all that he must, for safety's sake, be able to "remember". He had been through so much already, he said, that nothing had the power to astonish him any more. And in spite of the threat of danger in it, this unheard-of adventure began to appeal to his Irish soul. If he could ever get away and tell the world about it——

The girl's voice broke in upon his thoughts.

"You'd better dress now. I imagine our reception will be something gorgeous. Atlantis welcomes visitors from the outside world just once in a thousand years, you know."

He obeyed her, as he had got in the habit of doing. When he came out of the cabin again, he noticed for the first time long streamers of drifting seaweed. It grew thicker and thicker as they went along, swirling down the current ahead of them, behind them, beside them. But it did not interfere with them. The current took care of that.

And always the land ahead continued its changes before their eyes, resolved itself

at last into a wide-horned crescent of flat white beaches and tall palaces and towers and fair, green, colorful gardens, against a background of softly folded, mist-enshrouded hills. The pure beauty of it made them gasp.

The boats were crowded closely together now. O'Farrell could see the occupants of several of them. And they were all very much alike—all tall, all fair, all yellow-haired and blue-eyed, like the girl Diana. And they, like her, were all tremendously excited. Well, O'Farrell was excited too, but not so enthusiastic as the rest.

And then, before O'Farrell's dazed, incredulous eyes, dozens of islets broke away from the tips of the crescent's horns, came swinging through the quiet sea toward the boats. Each of these tiny isles was perfect in itself, seemed to be the very embodiment of some artist's dream of an enchanted land. Many were flower gardens, ablaze with unbelievable color, alive with circling song-birds. One held a lonely palm tree, leaning a little in the southern wind, rooted in a long narrow beach where bits of white coral rolled in the swirling water. Another bore a shrine with a white altar, vine-wreathed and smoking with incense, before which a group of children decked in the goatskins and hoofs and horns of fauns were playing on flute-like pipes made of reeds.

" 'Pipes o' Pan' ", O'Farrell thought. " 'Horns of elfland'—and all the rest of it. The thing's impossible. Thirst and the sun got me on that cursed raft and I'm delirious. Well, it's a pleasant enough way to die."

But even as he told himself that, he says he knew he lied. And,

"Remember the floating gardens of Mexico," the girl murmured, very low. "No doubt they were copied from these."

The boats were drawn into a line now, a line that curved in the middle, a crescent to match that other crescent of the shore. And the islets swept together in a circle about them, formed an atoll, leaving the boats in a still lagoon. The current which had brought them had spent itself, dissolved. Another force had swept the islets into place, was moving the boats toward the land. And, as a climax to all the rest, the mists which had hung above the hills swept downward and outward into a vast, circular curtain, completely blotting out all the world outside.

"Now, in the name of all the pagan gods at once!" muttered O'Farrell to the girl beside him. "Do these people know how to control the elements too?"

The girl Diana smiled serenely.

"Atlantis is very old and very wise," she told him quietly. "And its people have known neither war nor invasion nor famine nor pestilence for eleven thousand years. So, why shouldn't they have learned all that man can know in this world?"

The boats swept nearer and nearer toward the shore, with constantly diminishing speed. The sheer beauty and perfection of the scene, O'Farrell said, struck him dumb. The broad white beach, the steps and balconies of the tall white buildings, the terraces of the green hills—Plato's mounds, O'Farrell recognized—swarmed with tall, fair people. The men were garbed in tunics and kirtles, white in color, sandals and greaves of yellow leather, and great tall headdresses ornamented with yellow feathers set in a fanwise spread from left to right. The women were bareheaded except for jeweled fillets, and wore soft flowing robes of every imaginable tint. And in the foreground, extending all along the beach, was a chorus of young men and maidens, singing. The sound of their

voices surpassed anything O'Farrell had ever heard.

But the girl Diana put out a hand and touched him on the arm. She was trembling violently, and when he turned to look at her, he saw that her face was as white as chalk.

"That song," she whispered in a shaking voice. "I can understand every word of it—and you, of course, nothing at all!"

"Not one word," he said.

"Then—then——" Her tormented eyes were pleading. "Oh, I never thought once about the language! I never dreamed that I'd understand it! I had never heard it in the world outside, so how could I know? But—don't you see?—you must be careful. You must say that the ancestor from whom you inherit left Atlantis in the earliest times. They were invaded from the mainland once—the language must have altered——"

O'Farrell shook his head slowly. He felt, he said, as the "hero" of an old Greek tragedy must have felt—like one caught in a net and dragged, compellingly, inexorably, toward some unknown and unwelcome end. His had been a passive part from the beginning. He was utterly helpless, and knew it. He had no idea what might be coming, but whatever it was he must take it with as much fortitude as he was able.

"What is the use of lying?" he whispered back. "I'll never be able to get by with it. They'd better know in the beginning——"

"No, no, no!" She was tugging at his arm with both hands now. "Promise me you'll do as I tell you. Promise me!"

"All right," he assented, "but I'm afraid it won't help much. I know so little—Plato's writings—what I can remember of them—and what you've told me. They'll soon know I'm a fraud——"

"No!" she cried in a vehement whisper. "No! They shan't!"

THE boats touched land. O'Farrell and the girl got ashore somehow. The lemmings scampered after them, were snatched up and petted by a hundred hands. And then the chorus of voices and of strings rose to an exultant, triumphant pæan of joy and praise. The crowd pressed close. The whole scene became utterly unreal and dream-like. A perfect babble of incomprehensible words assailed O'Farrell's ears. He could not have made himself heard if he had wanted to. A group of old men, dressed in long yellow robes embroidered with curious, mystical designs, and miter-like head-dresses of gold, appeared suddenly in front of him. They were, he surmised, priests of the Atlantean religion. The foremost, doubtless the high priest, waved a veritable caduceus over O'Farrell's and the girl's heads in a gesture of consecration. Then they passed on, were hidden by the crowd.

With a little cry the girl Diana broke away and ran toward one of the newcomers, who was looking at her with a wild, delighted incredulity. It was a man who wore the uniform of a colonel of English infantry, with a string of ribbons across his breast. He looked to be nearing fifty, lean and tall and weary. He walked with a limp. His left arm was stiff. And a long scar, as if from a bayonet cut, ran down his left cheek. The girl had gone straight into his arms.

The throng divided. Great swaying elephants, caparisoned in yellow silk, and bearing howdahs of white ivory, made a lane for the newcomers. An elderly man wearing priestly garments emerged from the crowd and pressed a sort of diadem set with flashing stones down upon

O'Farrell's head. Metal pads fitted firmly behind O'Farrell's ears, and on the instant, though the words of the singers, the babble around him still sounded outlandish and strange, it all became intelligible to him.

"I am Otar," the old man said, smiling at O'Farrell's look of incredulity, "of the healing branch of the priesthood. And this instrument is a mechanical interpreter of tongues. We find it useful in helping newcomers to adjust themselves for the first few days. So today we are all wearing them in one shape or another." For a moment he studied O'Farrell through his shrewd, keen eyes. "And who was your honored Atlantean ancestor, my son? Do not hesitate to use your native tongue. Whatever you say, I shall be able to understand." And he touched his head-dress significantly.

O'Farrell braced himself. It was, he realized, now or never.

"My ancestor left Atlantis very young," he improvised with the facility of desperation. "Atlantis had been invaded, and he remembered little of it but the misery and oppression his people suffered at the hands of their conquerors. He had dreams of human sacrifice and games that ran with blood. He went as armor-bearer with an expedition to the mainland to make war upon a city afterward known as Athens. He was captured by these early Athenians and so never returned to Atlantis."

"Ah, that is extremely interesting!" exclaimed Otar, his blue eyes bright with interest. "And what was that armor-bearer's name?"

"His name was Gadir." O'Farrell pronounced firmly the only Atlantean name which Plato knew. After all, it was something to claim descent from the man for whom the Pillars of Herakles—the Rock of Gibraltar—had been named!

"Then you shall be called Gadir among us—Gadir, the bringer of the sacred lemmings. Your old name," with a slight gesture of his hand as if flicking from him a grain of dust, "your old name will be forgotten. Let me have your left wrist, if you please."

O'Farrell obeyed. How could he do otherwise? But he watched with some trepidation while the priest-physician drew what looked like a capsule of glass from a pocket and held it against O'Farrell's wrist. He felt but the slightest prickle. Then the old priest pocketed the glass again.

"A matter of precaution," he explained. "The outside world is, we know, a place of hideous suffering and disease. But now—you will not believe me, since your ancestor left us before our great discoveries were made—but now you will never know a moment's illness again."

And before O'Farrell had time to thank him he had bowed ceremoniously and vanished in the crowd.

Others, many others, came up and spoke to O'Farrell now, briefly or at length, making him welcome, praising him for the bringers of good fortune—the lemmings—which he had brought, asking him eager questions of the outside world, of which they had had no news for a thousand years. But now a procession was forming. O'Farrell was led to a kneeling elephant, helped into the gorgeous howdah. The girl Diana and the English colonel followed. The elephant lurched to its feet and they were off.

Before them paced at least two score of elephants. As many more were behind them. Only the newcomers and the body of priests rode. The rest of the people danced. Danced, literally, to an almost delirious music, in what seemed to be a

complete abandon of joy. Escorted by the whirling figures, they turned into a wide, white-paved avenue. Towering buildings stood on either side, flush with the pavement. But there were no people at the windows or on the balconies. Everyone, plainly, was in the street.

THE girl Diana leaned forward from her seat between O'Farrell and the Englishman. Her eyes were rapt, ecstatic.

"It's like the rarest sorcery," she sighed. "If one hadn't been prepared for it so long, it would be unbelievable."

"A land so self-contained," the Englishman mused, "that it has no need of the rest of the world; so versed in the arts of concealment that it need not fear the world; so wise, so happy that it does not envy the world—yes, it is, as you say, unbelievable."

The girl looked shyly at O'Farrell.

"Colonel Carter's ancestor who bequeathed him his memories was the father of the ancestor who gave me mine," she said simply. "We knew each other instantly."

"And," interposed the Englishman, before O'Farrell could speak, "since she can not remember her father, and since my daughter—an only child—was killed in an air raid over London nineteen years ago, we have agreed to be as father and daughter. It is very good of her," he added, gently.

"It's more than I can quite take in," O'Farrell ventured dazedly. His eyes were on that beautiful, gracious street, on the lumbering elephants ahead, on the beautiful, rejoicing people who whirled and danced. His ears were hypnotized by a music of voices, of pipes, of strings, of horns, such as surely the world outside had never known. "There's something in the air that—lifts you up," he added.

The Englishman laughed gently.

"Not in the air, my lad, but in that ichor in your blood-stream," he amended. "Crock that I am, it has made me feel different too. No more pain—no more disease. No death till the heart simply wears out and stops its work—or is stopped by violence. Ah, but one must wish he could tell the world about it."

"The world wouldn't believe," the girl Diana said. "Or if it did, it would want to rob us of our secrets and then, most likely, destroy us."

The Englishman sighed.

"You are probably right, my dear." He turned to O'Farrell again. "You and my new daughter are the only Americans here. I am the only Englishman. There are two Irishmen, a Welshman, and a Scandinavian. The rest, as one might expect, are from the rim of the Mediterranean—from Egypt, Spain, France, Crete, Greece, Italy, Asia Minor—where Atlanteans settled long ago. There were eleven Greeks who came together on that yacht. But then, the old Greeks were certainly direct descendants."

Again his keen blue eyes rested in what seemed a trace of puzzlement on O'Farrell's face.

"And you brought the lemmings. That was a fine thing, certainly."

"More an accident than anything else," O'Farrell told him. "I stumbled on them, on the way. It was Diana who fed and cared for them. Thank her, not me."

A faint pucker grew between the Englishman's fine brows. The girl gave O'Farrell a warning look.

"He was washed off his own—craft," she hastened to explain. "I was lucky enough to be able to pick them up. We came on together, you know."

"Yes, I know. Poor little beasts," returning to the lemmings. "To think of

remembering for more than eleven thousand years! Tiny, tiny brains to nourish faith so long. Because their ancestors made annual migrations, like the wild geese and the ducks and the ill-fated passenger pigeons, they still try it 'once in a hundred years.' If only they knew that it is only once in a thousand!"

"It puts our own faith to shame," the girl said.

"And yet inherited memories are probably more common than we think. Ours are entire. But consider the broken ones. And there are so many! One man may be lucky enough to be born with the genius of a great poet of centuries ago, and 'gain much fame thereby'. Another gets enough to put him in a madhouse—dreaming that he is King Solomon or Napoleon Bonaparte. Oh, I speak feelingly on the subject! I raved of my Atlantean memories so much in that French hospital back in 1918 that they thought I was mad. If I had not been lucky in my connections, and known to be greatly interested in ancient civilizations, I should be in a straitjacket now, I dare say. As for those other poor chaps——" He made a quick gesture with his uninjured hand. "Well, we are lucky. Let us be thankful."

He fell into a brooding silence. O'Farrell had no wish to break it. Nor did he dare to ask where they were going. Doubtless he was expected to know.

They paced slowly down the street. A great arch presently confronted them. The elephants passed through into a narrow, shadowy enclosure, began the descent of an ever winding, ever darkening road. It must lead to a temple, O'Farrell surmised. All the old races had worshipped in caves, he knew, as witness the Cretan labyrinth. He hoped, with an inward shudder, that there would be no sacrifices.

They went a long way. Where the light came from he could not tell, but though they must have penetrated deeply into the earth, the darkness never became complete. Always they could see the elephant ahead of them, the howdah swaying, ghost-like, on its back, till suddenly it knelt, then lurched to its feet again, then disappeared.

Their own elephant knelt. Shadowy forms helped them to alight, lowered voices bade them follow. So they climbed a high stairway of broad, shallow steps, fairly well lighted though they could not tell from what source, to a narrow doorway. Still following their conductors, they went through.

They came out into an enormous balcony, set with tables and benches. Other balconies were above this, still others beneath, sweeping in immense circles above the huge arena below.

The central feature of this arena was a high altar smoking with incense. Its white marble sides were painted with beautifully executed designs—the swastika; the Cretan double ax; Atlas with the sky on his shoulders; a winged horse, soaring; Medusa's head; the lemmings; Poseidon riding a storm at sea; the bucranium—the head of the sacrificial bull—with fillets; the minotaur.

Above it all arched a dome of the color of a summer sky at midnight. The sweeping zodiac with its twelve signs, the twelve planets which the Atlanteans, and—later—the Aztecs had known, blazed in this artificial heaven, giving light.

The girl Diana touched his arm, drew his attention from the unparalleled grandeur of that gorgeous ceiling to his more immediate surroundings. He followed her and the Englishman to one of the tables and sat down. He saw that the balcony was filled, though not overcrowded. Filled too were such portions

of the other balconies as he could see. All about him was a hushed murmur of conversation.

Boys and girls came in presently, bearing trays of food and wine which they placed upon the tables. These young people, O'Farrell decided, were neither slaves nor servants. They had all the air of hosts looking after the comfort of honored guests. Indeed, he realized suddenly that he had not yet seen anyone who seemed to be a servitor, nor any officials other than the priests. And he found the food, the drinks, though utterly unfamiliar to him, to be extraordinarily good.

Into the arena below filed the chorus which had welcomed them on the beach. Their musicians were with them—with harps of various shapes, though none too large to carry, pipes, small horns, odd-shaped lutes, a drum. A vast wave of melody rolled up to the silent people.

Dancers swept in, a medley, unearthly, beautiful yet somehow terrible, an awful unmasking of the ancient pageantry of the new-made earth. Goat-shepherd Pan with his fauns and satyrs, who hunted animals and dressed like them. A god-like, golden Prometheus, who brought down a flaming torch from the sky. The first horse-tamers, the centaurs. Nymphs and dryads decked with leaves, and with flowers in their hair. Warriors in helmets and armor. At last, the thinkers, priests of Atlantis in their yellow robes.

In turn they wove an intricate pattern of a myriad figures, fantastic yet weirdly beautiful. And suddenly O'Farrell began to understand. The music, the chanting, the dance, were all parts of a single symbolism. The age-old history of Atlantis was being enacted before him.

There was shown the slow, measured development of a primitive people, the constant outflow of the more restless to neighboring lands of the north, south, east and west; recurring earthquakes and human as well as animal sacrifices to placate the gods; invasion by an alien people and exile of many of the original race; finally the great ocean wave which broke up and almost destroyed the kingdom.

O'Farrell had sat spellbound. He had forgotten himself, his predicament, his danger. It was as if the panorama of thirty thousand years had been unrolled before him.

But now the scene changed. Dancers, chorus and music-makers drew aside, became a background for the procession which now entered the arena. These were the older priests in their lavishly embroidered, yellow robes and mitered head-gear, bearing scepter-like wands of gold; the high priest, who had exchanged his caduceus for a golden double-ax; half-naked youths, each of whom led in a filleted, snow-white bull; young girls in long, white robes and chaplets of white flowers.

"The sacrifice!" O'Farrell exclaimed under his breath, and felt the blood curdle around his heart.

"Oh, no," the Englishman whispered. "Watch!"

And the girl Diana gave him another look of warning and entreaty.

And then O'Farrell saw enacted, down there in that huge arena, a thing quite new and modern and yet as old as the oldest ritual of the ancient cult of the bull. One by one the beautiful long-horned bulls were released. One by one the young men leaped at them, seized their polished horns, and, in spite of the bulls' frantic struggles, pinned them to the earth. Each bull received a mock blow from the golden double-ax in the high priest's hand, was led away.

Then the young priestesses marched in a demure procession around the altar, and threw incense by handfuls upon the smoking fire, chanting their vows meanwhile to serve Atlantis' altar-fires for a year-long term of chastity and prayer.

O'FARRELL drew a deep breath of relief. No bloodshed there! But the original ceremony from which this one was directly descended—ah, that, certainly, had literally run with blood!

The high priest raised his hand.

"Children of the sun and of Atlantis," he cried. "You know why we are gathered here. You know that when the gods were wroth with us, when the earth split and the waters rose and the heavens poured fire upon us, even then the more merciful of our gods raised up leaders among us to save the remnants of our people and our land. They—these merciful ones—taught us how to set our broken isles adrift, how to bring them together, how to separate them again. They taught us how to control the mists of the air and the currents of the sea, how to remain for ever invisible to our enemies. And last, because they knew that every race must have new blood in order to survive, they taught us how to summon our own from the outside world—once in a thousand years!"

A very old man, that high priest. He took a step forward now, and lifted his arms high.

"We welcome you as our own, those of you who have come today from the far-flung parts of the earth. Ours is a happy land where every man works, and every man plays, and every man rests, eats, sleeps according to his need, and every woman the same. Forget, then, violence, injustice, ugliness, the cold of frost, the burning heat of the sun. There are none of those things here.

"And you know, too, you who are descended from Atlas and Poseidon, that the little ones, the lemmings, they who once gnawed loose the bonds of Poseidon's sea horses and set them free, made pilgrimages to our old land each year in the long ago. But when Poseidon in his anger at our disobedience and iniquities had overwhelmed the land which stood between, they could no longer reach us. Yet they tried, at certain times, and were swallowed up and lost."

His voice, which had sunk to a mournful cadence, suddenly ceased. He spread his hands. And, as if by magic, out from behind the smoking altar scampered the lemmings, chattering, running this way and that.

Applause burst from the people, wild, deafening, and lasting long. But at last the high priest raised his hand, and silence fell. His voice came again, triumphant now.

"These did not die! The mighty Poseidon sent them to us, a sign of his favor, of his forgiveness, of his promise to preserve us—for another thousand years! And he chose as his instruments a youth and a maiden who came together. Let them, therefore, descend and stand before me, that all Atlantis may behold and honor those whom our father Poseidon has pointed out as his most favored children."

Dazed and thunderstruck, O'Farrell felt the girl Diana's hand take his. It was as cold as ice. But she did not speak. Together they threaded their way among the tables, down the stair, along a shadowy passage, through a door. At last they were in the center of the arena, a hand of the high priest rested on each head.

"All Atlantis thanks you," the old man finished simply.

"Ah, it was nothing to be thanked

for," Diana said, a catch in her voice. "It was a duty, an obligation, and a pleasure beyond all telling. We *loved* to do it."

"And," O'Farrell added, feeling it incumbent upon him to say something and not knowing what to say, "we hope, now that they are here, that they will grow in numbers year by year, so you will never be without them again."

And then it seemed to him that the atmosphere was charged with something dreadful, as if the sky had cracked, or the earth opened, or the sea forsook its bed. Silence. Like the dead weight of a nightmare, like the awful certainty of death.

At last the high priest's voice came in a strangled whisper—a whisper that yet seemed to reverberate to the remotest corner under that blazing dome.

"Who are you?" he demanded. "How did you come here if you do not know—is it indeed possible you do not remember?—that the lemmings, like the wild geese and the salmon and so many other creatures, must go north in the spring to breed?"

And then O'Farrell knew that he was done.

"Deceit, imposture, falsehood," came the inexorable voice of the high priest. "These things have always borne the brand of treason, and treason is punishable by death." His voice rose to a lamentable cry. "I am accursed, that the duty has devolved upon me to condemn a man to death!"

"No!" the girl cried in a desperate voice. "No! He had no intention to deceive. It was I who made him do that. I did not know—my memories were too old to tell me—that now you worship only the more merciful of the Atlantean gods. My ancestor went with Quetzalcoatl to America. And at that time Atlantean worship was a cruel and bloody thing!"

"How did he come?"

"By accident only. The current caught him—him and the lemmings. He could not help but come. And he shall not die! I appeal to the people!" Her voice rose to a scream. "He shall not die!"

"He shall not die!" It was the Englishman. He was standing, his right arm thrown upward, palm out, in the universal gesture of friendship, peace.

And "He shall not die!" came in shouts from this section and that as the newcomers leaped to their feet. O'Farrell could distinguish them by their dress, but not for long. For in a moment they were hidden by the up-surging multitude.

"He shall not die!" shouted Atlantis with one voice. "He brought us the lemmings! He shall not die!"

"The lemmings, and good fortune with them for a thousand years," the girl Diana cried. "The people have spoken. He shall go in peace."

"The people have spoken," assented the high priest. "There shall be no blood on my hands tonight. Shall he remain or shall he depart? It is for him to choose."

But O'Farrell stood still, too overwhelmed with bewilderment and uncertainty to speak. The shocks had been too many and too close together. He was at that moment incapable of choice.

The girl looked at him, long and hard. A queer little smile rested on her lips for a moment. She made a slight, despairing movement with her hands. At last she spoke.

"He would never be happy with us. Let him go."

They put him in her boat, O'Farrell said. It was night then, but the sky was clear and the moon and the stars hung low. They brought him food and presents of all sorts, and said many kind

things to him. They didn't want him to go. That was plain. But he was still too numbed to combat the girl's decision—she had guided him so long. He let her guide him now. So—he went.

For a little while he could see the land behind him. But presently it seemed to break up, to be floating in fragments of beauty on the bosom of the sea, at last to be no more than a mist, a mirage, a dream of faery. . . .

"BUT," I demanded then, incredulously, "why didn't you come home? You were gone three years or more. And this adventure, you say, took up hardly more than a week!"

"And at that I was luckier than the Portuguese who spent one night there and took a hundred years to get back home," O'Farrell answered, with a strange smile. "But my further adventures were commonplace enough. The Atlanteans had done all they could for me, but they couldn't give me gasoline. So when the stock in the boat gave out, which was soon, I drifted. A tramp picked me up, a privately owned trading-vessel with no wireless. She was bound for the South Pacific, and I had to go, willy-nilly—around the Horn—stopping to trade first one place and another—till we came to the very jumping-off place of the world, it seemed to me. And that was a plague-stricken place—typhus, the mate said it was. He and two sailors and I were left there. We were on shore when the captain found out about the epidemic, and he simply lifted anchor and left us—in a blue funk, I suppose.

"But it's plain he spread the news of the sickness, for there wasn't a boat that came near us for—well, something like two years, I imagine. You lose track of time out there—and," wearily, "you have lots of time to think."

"Well?" I said, for I knew there must be something more.

"Oh, I came home. But I had proof while I was there that I hadn't dreamed about—Altantis. It was true. For that shot in the arm the priest gave me did what he said it would. At least two-thirds of the natives died of that plague. The mate and the two sailors died—horribly. But I stayed right with them and did all I could for them and wasn't sick a day. That's proof, I think. And it's quite likely that I'll live to be a hundred or more—just as that Portuguese did—whether I want to or not."

"And now you wish you had stayed when you had the chance, or that you could go back?"

I don't know why, but I was quite certain of his answer before he spoke.

"Oh, yes." He sat still a long time, twisting his pipe between his fingers. "I want to go back. But I can't. That current won't flow again for another thousand years. I was a fool, a poor, blind fool. It's hell, you know, just plain hell——" His head drooped forward a little, hopelessly. "It's hell to love a woman—and not have sense enough to find it out—till after you have lost her—for ever."

And after a while he repeated in a voice of indescribable weariness and bitterness:

"Perhaps, long since, there was a land beyond,
Westward from death, some city, some calm place,
Where one could taste God's quiet and be fond
With the little beauty of a human face;

"But now the land is drowned, yet still we press
Westward, in search, to death, to nothingness."

"The thirsty blade was beginning its slow descent when the trembling frame of Lavorkis was suddenly transfixed as if by a lance of ice."

Satan in Exile

By ARTHUR WILLIAM BERNAL

A stupendous weird novel of a space bandit whose exploits made him a veritable Robin Hood of the airways

The Story Thus Far

PRINCE TORGENY, a handsome young nobleman of the terrestrial court, is doomed to exile on the prison planet Triton, by his ruthless enemy, High Prince Fane, Overlord of Earth. With him is sent a beloved comrade, Feloth the Wise, an aged scientist who is blind. Torgeny vows he will return from across millions of miles of space to

avenge himself on the Overlord who had cost him so much wo.

Aboard the *Oila,* the prison ship, Stully, her drunken captain, disfigures Torgeny for life by a savage lash-cut across the face. Inflamed with wrath, Torgeny gets one of the crew of Martians—giant redmen sold to Stully as slaves—to free him, and leads an attack against the brutal captain. After a battle, in which Torgeny's left arm is seared into uselessness by a blast from Stully's ray-gun, the exile secures control of the prison ship. By efforts of his aides, Stully and his men meet death in the void, leaving Torgeny in full possession of the vessel.

Through extremely strange circumstances, the *Oila* is landed safely in a hiding-place somewhere within the depths of the Jovian satellite, Ganymede, a compact little world with breathable air. Here is founded a stronghold by Torgeny and his huge peasant Martians, which tiny kingdom he names Home. To outfit Home snugly and adequately, Torgeny finds himself forced to forage among space-transports for supplies. Eventually he becomes a thorough corsair, one whose skill and fearlessness make him greatly feared by all. Officially, Prince Torgeny is listed as dead.

Feloth fashions for the crippled exile an arm and hand of gleaming steel to replace the left limb lost in the battle on the prison ship. Science again proves the supremacy of machine over flesh, and with his metal forearm Torgeny becomes a superman. His dangerous escapades bring him the name of Prince Satan, Lord of the Great Blackness. He becomes the most-wanted man in the annals of the space-police.

A secret, which Feloth keeps locked inside his brain, results in affording Satan's space-ship the most powerful motors ever devised, utilizing synthetic coronium as a fuel. With his super-ship and his miraculously accurate steel arm, Prince Satan becomes invincible among mortals. Satan names his sleek cruiser the *Space Waif.*

As a consequence of his prowess, Threepa, a Venusian renegade who is a rival for pirate supremacy, challenges Satan to a duel and is accepted. By trickery, Threepa sends out three ships against Satan's one. Satan "burns" one, then flees. Threepa's other two vessels follow in hot pursuit and the Venusian buccaneer feels triumph in his grasp, when all at once Satan's cruiser apparently vanishes from space!

The story continues:

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9. *Satan Duels with Drexx*

ONE instant Prince Satan's cruiser was limping along just beyond reach of the expectant space-lord, and the next there was the mushrooming billow of a tremendous blast from white-hot propulsion tubes, and the *Space Waif* flicked out of existence in a trail of coruscating fire.

Thus it seemed to the xanthic-eyed Threepa, as he gaped in wonderment at his seeing-charts. But in reality, Satan, having tired of his cat-and-mouse tactics and observing that the two pursuing vessels behind were strung out a great distance apart, had merely given the responsive *Space Waif* a surge of full power from the thunderous coronium motors; now he was wheeling back in a great circle toward the rearmost Venusian ship, at an incredible velocity.

The Earthman, agonized and clinging leadenly to his control panel from the effects of his additional acceleration, was on his prey and swooping past her, all beams blazing haphazardly, before that vessel was aware that the enemy had even commenced to double back. Certainly

her captain never dreamed of being attacked from the rear!

Threepa watched his view-plates fade into momentary blank grayness as they were suddenly overtaxed by a titanic flare of incandescence, marking the destruction of his second ship. He snapped on his defense screens full-strength without more ado, although he was only dimly aware of what had happened. Immediately the high whining of the purifiers ground protestingly down-scale a few notes as power rushed hullward to the protective envelope, and Threepa ordered the spare oxygen tanks opened .10.

He was just in time with his defense. The *Space Waif* was hastily decelerating almost opposite the *Vroola* in another moment and was swinging leisurely broadside, all beams spraying hotly against the Venusian's glimmering ship.

Then began a long and painful siege. With the decided advantage offered by ultra-powerful coronium motors, the *Space Waif* managed to eke out enough superfluous energy, despite keeping all three of her beams probing incessantly about her enemy, to constantly shift position about the helplessly drifting *Vroola.*

Threepa, on the other hand, was forced to shunt all available power into the maintenance of his protective screens, for with a trio of lethal rays ever playing over his vessel, once his defense weakened—even for a fraction of a second—he was doomed. Moreover, the hapless Venusian could not move his ship at all unless somehow he could contrive to get more power out of his already complaining generators, and this demand Threepa could not meet.

Hunched in his cramped control room, the giant space-lord slowly wriggled his great ears in unhappy doubt. What could he do? If only he were able to penetrate his blanket of protection with radio he could flash an S. O. S. to the space police, though he burned with shame even to think of it. Threepa the Scourge asking the police for help! Anyway, it was impossible, because his infernal screens completely nullified waves of all the major lengths save those of light itself—and it distorted even those. If he could let his screens down for just one second . . . but one second would be quite enough for Satan to blow him clean out of space.

Something had to be done soon if Satan continued to stay on the scene. Why didn't he run out of oxygen and pull off? Threepa cursed himself in several tongues for selecting so deserted a stretch of the void. Despite that long chase and all the empty miles they had traversed in aimless drifting, they were still too far from any space-lane for some ship to stumble upon them and frighten Satan away.

Yet something had to be done. The *Vroola's* generators were weakening under the terrific strain imposed upon them, and in the various sealed sections of the squat vessel the air was growing unbearably foul to Venusian lungs, even though now the spare oxygen tanks were stepped up desperately close to 1. A few hours more and—but he wouldn't surrender! Not the space-lord—not Threepa the Scourge! Never, by Sirius, never!

But he did surrender. His crew, being used to an atmosphere heavy with rich oxygen, at last could endure the close air of their quarters no longer, and decided to take things in their own hands. If Threepa was too stubborn to surrender, they were not.

Come on, men, unseal those doors! You there, get ready to jump Threepa while we keep him occupied! Follow us.

SATAN, waiting with grim patience in the control cabin of the *Space Waif,* could not see the air-starved, mutinous

crew of the *Vroola* as it stormed over the Venusian bandit chieftain in an ireful flood, and usurped command of the doomed vessel. Satan only saw the outward sign of the revolution—the showing of the white flag of surrender from the *Vroola's* conning-tower. When his weary eyes discerned the drooping bit of white cloth which proclaimed the end of the long and tiresome siege, the exile from Earth uttered a sigh of relief.

Satan immediately sent word to the engine room for the oxygen to be stepped up from half-ration to .8—which news was gratefully received even by those sturdy dwellers of the thin-aired planet—and then calmly waited for the customary five minutes to elapse.

When that short interval had passed, the *Vroola's* defense screens dwindled quickly into nothingness, and Satan's deflected beams flashed carefully in again upon the vanquished space-lord's floundering craft, and hacked her into six neat slices. The Venusian crew, according to formula, were clustered in the *Vroola's* engine room in space-outfits, their unconscious chieftain bulky upon the floor in his own giant helmet and suit. When all but the engine room of the captured ship had been demolished, Satan's voice sounded thinly in the ears of Threepa and his crew as he addressed them by means of the tiny radio units inside their space helmets.

"I am sorry, but I must leave you now, gentlemen, for my air supply is growing dangerously small," the Earthman purred softly in the swampmen's own dialect. "However, if you promise to be patient while I'm gone, I'll send a flash to the space police and give them your location. I'm sure they will be glad to pick you up. *L'uul sholem,* Threepa. Behave yourself. And pay my compliments to Inspector Drexx when you meet him!"

Having concluded his speech to the chagrined Venusians, Satan plugged off and was on the verge of withdrawing, when his own cabin speaker unexpectedly blared out.

"Prince Satan. Inspector Drexx, calling Prince Satan," boomed a voice whose accents were more than familiar to the man with the ebon eyes. "Satan, it will be quite unnecessary to flash me your present location, for I already have it. To be perfectly truthful, Satan, the space police located you and Threepa some time ago. Had you not been so absorbed in your comical, conceited little duel, you would doubtless have seen us. Look about you now. Surprized?"

There was a short pause. Satan shot a hurried look at his seeing-charts. To his horror he discovered that the *Space Waif* was in the very center of a thick globe of scarlet and yellow police ships. He was trapped.

"Thanks for your aid in collecting Threepa for us, Satan. You super-egotistical pirates are regular little mother's helpers when you engage each other in cock-fights to see who can lick whom. On our way in to pick up the charming ex-Space-lord, we'll be only too happy to stop off for you, too. Here we come!"

The mocking voice of the young police inspector ceased, and Satan saw the rings of patrol ships commence to draw closer to him from all sides. Most of them had red-flaring beams hungrily licking his way, although they were far from being within weapon range as yet.

With the pale streak of scar tissue on his right cheek twitching his lips into nervous little half-smiles, Satan whispered quietly but rapidly into his microphone for his crew to throw on full oxygen and stand by for rapid fuel feed.

Narrowed black eyes scanned brilliantly painted hulls of onrushing cruisers for a second longer; then picking out the rapidly swelling dot that was Inspector Drexx's own ship—the *Falling Leaf*—by

its distinctive shape, Satan's quick fingers darted over the control studs, sending his trim craft lunging straight for his ancient enemy.

Like a thunderbolt, the *Space Waif* rushed toward that section of the great constricting bubble of ships in which was located the *Falling Leaf*. The lights of his cabin dimmed as a heavy surge of power was shunted into a long tongue of dull red death which leapt out belligerently in the direction of Inspector Drexx's approaching cruiser. But Drexx, veteran of a hundred battles, could not be snared so easily as all that, and the *Falling Leaf* strained forward like a dart of lambent light under his own dancing fingers.

From Satan's speaker—though he scarcely heard it—and from those of all that throng of weaving ships, came a shouted order in the breathless voice of Inspector Drexx.

"Keep stations! This is just between us two. Keep out of it! I'll take him alone!"

It seemed that, despite chiding Satan a few moments earlier for having too much conceit, the rash Inspector Drexx was not without a taint of egotism himself.

Into the very center of that vast globe of yellow and scarlet wasps flashed the official champion of the Code's stern mandates, and the Lord of the Great Blackness, to try their prowess. Hunter and hunted commenced a whirling dance of death, the tiny vessels spinning and spiraling in the boundless emptiness like the molecules of an atom gone mad. Swerving beams striped the abyss, stabbing venomously at wheeling, slipping targets. Hazy defense screens shimmered on and off like crazy space-heliographs flashing insane messages through the void. Two corkscrewing flecks—one dull black, the other gaudily banded—caught in a gusty mistral of infinity, dancing like dervishes in a lunatic vortex of spurting pyrotechnics.

Threepa

SATAN, except for one mirthless grin of admiration for Drexx's foolhardy desire to make a one-man show of it, remained as cold and emotionless as the polar ice on Pluto. Only the flickering, glimmering sheen that was the dancing web of his steel fingers, and the ceaselessly roving space-black eyes, seemed to show life in that tensed body.

Inspector Drexx, on the other hand, chewed upon his lower lip as he sent writhing, twisting fingers of flesh and blood over his own control studs in a frenzy of haste. And, hemming in the two combatants, the great sphere of police ships hung without motion in the nothingness, a thousand pairs of dazzled eyes following in utter silence the scarcely visible, lightning-swift maneuvers of the reckless duelists.

Then the defense screens of Inspector Drexx suddenly failed him.

Just after he had sent a streak of red destruction licking vainly after the twisting tail of the *Space Waif*, the valiant officer jabbed at his screen-control stud in anticipation of Satan's next-moment reprisal. Satan had spun his own ship with sickening abruptness and was whirling in upon his opponent, probing pencils of doom glowing wrathfully, when he saw Drexx's protection screens shimmer on, then go almost instantly blank again.

The snake-scar on his cheek writhed like a living thing as Satan's thin lips curled in a smile of dark triumph. Ten seconds more and Inspector Drexx would join the long list of heroes who had given their lives for the service.

That short distance between the vengeful space pirate and his target seemed to close with infinite slowness, and Satan had plenty of time to wonder vaguely, even as his steel forefinger extended itself to depress the beam-control stud which would cancel one more enemy, just why his antagonist had so amateurishly left himself open to attack.

"Men!" choked Drexx's strained voice from Satan's loudspeaker and from all those of the paralyzed spectators as well. "Men! Ray defense shot! We're gone! But don't let Satan escape! My last order—*get Satan!"*

Ray defense shot! So that was it. Satan's brain whirled with dizzying swiftness. In a few seconds his savage beams would rip the *Falling Leaf* from where she hung, helpless in the void, and scatter her flame-dripping atoms over all infinity; but compared to Satan's lightning thoughts time was standing still. It seemed as though a million conflicting thoughts pulsed through his head as the long steel forefinger hovered uncertainly above the fatal stud.

Unprotected! Satan was going to burn a helpless crew. A very brave man, his enemy only in line of duty, was about to die—blasted into eternity, unable to protect himself, as he watched his murderer track him down. Defenseless!

A split second later the *Space Waif* had hurtled beneath and beyond her target. But in the very moment of passing, her stabbing pencils of annihilation had gone dark. And the *Failing Leaf* still hung unharmed, a red and yellow capsule, in the maw of the Great Blackness.

Before the hypnotized watchers of this unforeseen stroke of gallantry had thawed into action, before the courageous commander of the *Falling Leaf* could gasp either a prayer of thanks or a word of warning, Satan's hurtling cruiser gashed into the serried ranks of the mighty spacesphere like a sword through water; emerging almost instantaneously from the shattered wall of vessels, with a great scorching ribbon of shooting flame lingering in her wake. The astounding vandal of the void, now in the role of fugitive, set his already white-hot propulsion tubes ashudder under an additional charge of exploding coronium, and swiftly vanished Homeward—leaving only the thin streamer of fast-melting incandescence to mark his course.

With growing faintness, Prince Satan's musically soft chuckle sounded tauntingly in the control cabin of the *Falling Leaf*.

"My compliments to you, Inspector Drexx, until we meet again," came Satan's smooth tones from across the widening gulf of nothingness. "I couldn't bring myself to burn a helpless and defenseless victim, even though it was only you, Inspector. I should be happy to encounter you some other time—when you're in a ship that will not fall apart while you're in maneuvers! *L'uul sholem,* Inspector!"

And as the Venusian *au revoir* faded gently from his speaker, Inspector Nderso Drexx, giving orders for what he well knew would be a fruitless chase, slowly blinked his steel-gray eyes in bewilderment, not quite knowing whether to be relieved at his remarkable escape from death or chagrined at foolishly losing the most slippery desperado in the history of the space police.

Thus did Satan prove his supremacy in the vast realm over which he had been proclaimed lord. . . .

10. Satan Seeks the High Prince

For long had Satan planned retaliation against High Prince Fane, the man he held responsible for all his cruel misfortunes; for long had he fingered his livid scar, creeping snakily from its start under the black bangs, down across the

entire width of his grim face, thinking thoughts black with vengeance; for long had he sat with burning eyes fixed stonily upon his shining left arm as the metal fist slowly clenched and unclenched, brooding upon his deformity; and for long had he stood gazing into his garden pool at the reflection of his bizarre costume, all ebon blackness and blood crimson, plotting his dark revenge.

Always had he stopped his ears against the earnest pleadings of his sole terrestrial companion—the faithful Feloth. Always had he murmured softly, "Do not try to dissuade me, Feloth. It is useless. For I shall make Fane suffer—some day. It is inevitable. Fane *must* pay for all—this. But not yet . . . not yet."

Satan's method of making Earth's Overlord account for his sins was to be anything but crude. Its delicacy, in fact, was what made the pirate hesitate during all those long years before he struck; because Satan's intended revenge called not for mere sudden death, but for a long life of torment. Slowly, through the years, Satan was accumulating jot after jot of evidence against the man he hated just as he had once done upon the face of Earth—evidence which would undermine the unsuspecting Fane's lordly career bit by bit. Satan's plan of vengeance would not be complete until Fane was an old and broken man, dragged with inexorable slowness from the crags of greatness down through the mire of gradual exposure and disgrace.

This was the terrible plan conceived by the loneliest brain in the universe. But it was a revenge that never materialized.

For one day Satan, secure in his beautiful and extensive underground gardens where grew the rarest of exotic blooms, garnered from every known soil in the solar system, received news which caused him to abandon his subtle schemings for a more speedy satisfaction.

Prince Satan

On that day Poog, brother to the spongy Tina and willing spy for the strange pale man he loved so dearly, had flashed a hurried call from Earth. The coded message, received and deciphered by Feloth, was sent instantly to the exile, resting on the fresh greensward between his myriad rows of rainbow blossoms.

Waugh, snuffing delightedly at the warm air, heavy with the dreamy incense of flame-orchids, scurried down the mossy paths to where his master sat in melancholy revery.

As the Earthman's snapping eyes absorbed the message, his mutilated face lost its forlorn smile of forgetfulness and gradually assumed its customary taut sternness. When he had finished reading, the throbbing blood behind his slashed cheek made the long, pale scar-thread pulse angrily, and although he was not aware of it, steel fingers crushed the delicate blossom they had so lightly held a moment before.

For Poog, working as a laborer in the laboratories of Thorg Lua—one of the Venusian members of Earth's court and one-time comrade of Prince Torgeny—had run across some ugly news. His master, Thorg Lua, had a few days previously announced the discovery of certain electro-magnetic waves of extremely high frequency, above those even of the Gamma rays,

Waugh

which had a weird and infinitely dangerous effect upon the fragile tissues of living brain cells. The scientist had, so read the message, performed a successful demonstration before High Prince Fane and the rest of the court only the day before. This morning his apartments had been found in great disorder and Thorg Lua could not be located. No complete records of his experiments were available which were not in an unreadable cipher.

Poog had good reason to believe that Fane had abducted the missing scientist and was trying to force from him his secret before certain orthodox officials were apprised of it. Now the Universal Anti-War Fund, as Torgeny well knew, was founded by the three worlds for the mutual advancement of peace. From this fund, contributed equally by Mars, Venus and Earth, who also share in common its benefits, substantial sums of money are paid to inventors for the rights to any discoveries which might be adapted to warfare. Since it is impossible to prevent such martial discoveries from being made, the purpose of this fund is to promote peace by buying them up for common distribution among the tri-world governments, discouraging by its generous price any negotiations between inventors and private corporations which might lead to one world's securing an advantage over another. Further, according to the Code, if Fane or any other person not connected with the Anti-War Fund obtained advance knowledge of Lua's invention, he would be guilty of an extremely serious offense, no matter what the reason behind the securing of such information. Thus, since it was only logical that the abductors of Lua had taken tremendous pains not to betray themselves, it was but natural that Poog had no idea where the vanished man could be found. But at the same time, there were also—so one of his courtier friends had that morning whispered to Poog—hints of a possible breach in diplomatic relations with Mars in the near future. Was there any connection between the two occurrences, did the master think?

Satan knew there was. Crumpling the message into a ball, he flung it from him and, eyes blazing, strode off toward his humble palace, Waugh trotting puzzledly behind.

FELOTH raised his brows questioningly as he heard his young confederate quietly enter the room and silently reach for the peg where hung his weapon belt.

"What are your plans, my son?" asked the old man, sensing the corsair's actions.

"Feloth," remarked Satan very softly, as he buckled on the broad belt and removed his ray-guns for careful inspection, "the time has come when Fane is going to account to me for his treacheries. I am rather sorry. I should have liked to make him suffer as I had planned. That would have been much better. But if the information I just received is reliable, and I'm sure it is, Fane must die at once."

"Explain yourself more fully, Highness."

"Reading between the lines. Fane is brewing an interplanetary war. He has been secretly agitating a conquest of Mars for a long time. That was what I was trying to prove even in the old days. Being Overlord of Earth is not enough for Fane. He'd sell his soul to have Mars under his thumb, too. I'm positive of that. Can you imagine, Feloth? An interplanetary war just to satisfy one man's lust for power! But tell me something about Thorg Lua's discovery, Feloth. I must be sure. Have you heard much about it?"

"Why, yes," returned the aged scientist. "Thorg Lua's work has been causing something of a furor in the scientific world of late. From what I have gath-

ered from the televisor, it seems that for several years Thorg Lua has been trying to return life to uninjured bodies.

"In several instances he has succeeded in starting the heart to beat and the blood to flow again in a corpse, thus bringing some semblance of life back into newly dead bodies. But always he was faced with one apparently insurmountable difficulty. His resurrected men were no more than physically alive—their minds seemed for ever lost in eternity."

"Yes, I know," put in Satan, gazing critically down the barrel of a shiny weapon, "but that isn't the reason why Fane kidnapped this scientist."

"No, but it leads directly to that reason. Thorg Lua found that his trouble with dead men's brains was due to the fact that the shock of death—which must be a fearful one when you consider what the shock of fright alone can do—that the shock of death literally *burned* out the tender brain tissues, somewhat after the manner of a jolt from an extremely high voltage wire.

"Now, when a storm of protest arose over Lua's cadaverous jousts with immortality, he altered his line of experiment and tried to solve the mystery of what may be termed as 'death-shock.' He was more successful here than in his former scientific attempts.

"In short," summed up the white-haired speaker, acutely aware of his listener's impatient shuffling of feet, "Thorg Lua has discovered how to generate electromagnetic impulses of an astonishingly high frequency, which instantly sear all living brain tissue beyond repair. In still other words, Thorg Lua can, by his discovery, cause artificial death-shock—he has produced the first actual 'death ray' ever to be invented!"

Satan grunted in grim understanding. "I was correct, Feloth. You see how simple a matter it would be for Fane to smash so-called civilized Mars—I don't believe the nomad plainsmen matter one way or another — with such a weapon? You say death is instantaneous —why, the battles would be over almost before they began, and the redmen would have not even a single survivor to list as wounded!

Feloth

"If Fane gets Thorg Lua's secret before I find him," a steel fist pounded the table for emphasis, "the Overlord must never escape alive. For the sake of millions of innocent humans and the safety of two worlds, Fane must die!"

The scarlet-clad corsair's dark eyes smoldered like white-hot propulsion tubes in the heart of ebon space, as he reached for his huge black cloak hanging by the doorway.

"And who," he whispered in dulcet tones which rivaled the soft crooning of a cultured Venusian, "who would make a more appropriate executioner than myself?

"I'm shoving off, Feloth, at once. *L'uul sholem!*"

"But, Torgeny——" began the blind wizard pleadingly.

The slam of a heavy door was his only answer. . . .

TAKING care to dodge all intervening space-patrol ships, the *Space Waif* had pursued her unobtrusive way toward the green planet. Now, avoiding the well-charted stratospheric lanes of the world-girdling rocket transports, she was gliding eagerly down through the protective cloud blanket toward the dim, treasured globe below. Satan was coming home.

Staring stedfastly into his seeing-charts, Satan watched the great relief map that was United China slide by below him. A moment more and he was over the broad expanse of restless dull green that was the mighty Pacific, nosing deftly toward his goal on the eastern coast of the North American continent, without losing any more speed than was absolutely necessary.

A minute later the cosmic buccaneer was soaring high over a tiny cluster of white-foamed flecks, all that remained of a once powerful nation named Japan. In the last great Sino-Japanese encounter, the newly unified forces of the Great Dragon had rid themselves once and for all of their persistent annoyers by generating a great series of artificial earthquakes which, running in gigantic uncheckable waves eastward from the coast of China, had jolted and shaken the teeming isles of the Nipponese until they had collapsed upon themselves in utter ruin.

But Satan was not interested in viewing the remnants of an ancient war. What he desired to see was the bright neon glow of the huge world capital, Nyork, spreading beneath his ship; and so he urged the *Space Waif* onward until her outer hull was glowing from the terrific friction. . . .

Somewhere in vast and magnificent Nyork the scientist Thorg Lua was held captive, tortured perhaps, by the infamous High Prince Fane. But where?

Inside his rapidly cooling cabin aboard the *Space Waif*, now slowly settling landward through the night sky toward the light-deluged levels of the metropolis which was his goal, Satan pondered this very question. Finally the space pirate gave orders for Waugh to assume control and circle the outskirts of the capital, while he thought about the problem.

Then, as the purring cruiser swerved in a wide arc over Nyork's coastline—the only place not flooded with brilliant pin-points of light—there popped suddenly into Satan's head the most logical of all hiding-places. The monster tidal tower of Lavorkis!

Lavorkis, humble vassal to the High Prince, would no doubt be glad to offer the Overlord the privacy and secrecy of his windowless cylindrical laboratory which stood almost completely submerged in the dark swells of the broad Atlantic, just off the coast. The lonely, spray-drenched tower of Lavorkis had witnessed more than one buried crime in the past, and on this night it was undoubtedly the scene of another. Of course!

In a smooth gull-like swoop, Waugh sent the *Space Waif*—all lights now turned off to give invisibility—gliding toward the black pill-box top of the structure which was her destination. After he had maneuvered into position directly above the round roof of the isolated tidal tower, Waugh let the *Space Waif* sink gently downward until her slender prow nudged alongside its entrance-port, close to the ocean's surface. So near to the surging waters was the sleek space-eagle that each of her occasional balancing blasts sent a cloudy wreath of steam skyward.

Ordering his small crew to keep the ship in readiness for an instant take-off, Satan loosened his ray-guns in their holsters, drew his all-enveloping cape about him, and watched the entrance-port in the nose of the ship silently unscrew and swing outward. A moment later he stood on the dark rooftop, drawing the sweet, cool air of Earth into his grateful lungs.

He knew that any possible occupants of the submerged tower could not have heard the gentle grating of the *Space Waif's* prow as she scraped to a standstill beside the building, and so his presence was unknown. A quick survey of the ocean about him apprised the marauder of the fact that not a single boat of any

kind was within sight. Apparently the men inside the tower, if there were any, had sent away whatever vehicle had brought them there.

A SCARCELY audible drone suddenly jerked his face upward to scan the skies. He watched a lone helicopter with muted motors pass slowly overhead. But he did not grow alarmed; muted motors were common enough on private ships now, and this one did not circle back to investigate.

Yet the thought struck him that the *Space Waif,* even though she was the same size and shape as every standard cruiser of any of the planets and not of a distinctive design like the *Vroola* or the *Falling Leaf,* must be rather conspicuous as she hovered about a lonely stretch of ocean at this hour of the night. Accordingly, the space brigand stole silently back to his ship and gave a few succinct orders. Immediately afterward the lock of the *Space Waif* clanked open and out slid her tiny two-man life-shell manned by the faithful Waugh. This done, the dark eagle of the void abruptly soared spaceward, and by the time her initial fiery blast had melted into the misty darkness, she was completely out of sight. In the swirls of gathering fog, Waugh, priming the little motors of the life-shell for instant flight, watched the phantom figure of his master vanish from his seeing-charts as he returned once more to the tower entrance.

It took Satan but a moment to cross the steely expanse of the tower's flat roof to that door which, so far as he knew, was the sole means of entrance to the place. As his hand reached out to try the triangular door-knob, the exile's eyes caught a glimpse of the big sign painted above the lintel. "Structure for the Utilization of Tidal Power—Keep Out!" it read. Torgeny snorted. Tidal power! He'd give a fortune to the one who could locate anything that even looked like a tide-engine in this cylinder in the sea.

But to work.

The angular handle of the portal turned noiselessly within Satan's cautious grasp, but when he attempted to push open the door of metal, it would not budge. When a knob turns and yet will not open the door to which it is attached, that door must be bolted. So reasoned the pirate, with simple logic. And when a door is bolted, it indicates the presence of someone on the other side to bolt it. His guess had been right then: something *was* going on inside this lonely laboratory —and that something required locked doors!

Satan placed an ear against a cold panel but could hear nothing but the ceaseless mutter of the surf. At the expense of almost an entire charge from one of his guns—for the steel rods were many and very fat—the exile efficiently burned through the restraining bolts and quickly swung the heavy door inward.

Tss!

Satan instinctively ducked at the familiar, ominous sound. His own fresh ray-gun whipped out and stabbed into darkness toward the little red flare which had nearly drilled him. But if his unknown assailant had erred in his aim, Satan's steel arm had not. There was a short, painful grunt, followed by the soft thud of a falling body, and a second later the pirate's nostrils were twitching under the disagreeable odor of burnt flesh.

Satan stepped into the black and eased the door soundlessly shut behind him. Overlord Fane and Thorg Lua might not be present within the tower of Lavorkis, but whatever was going on here must be dangerous business if hidden sentinels had orders to burn on sight.

But in what part of the submerged structure were its mysterious occupants?

As far as the invader could tell, the entire building was in total darkness. How could anyone——

But what was that? Footsteps! Feet scraping on rungs of a metal ladder. Getting fainter—going down, then. So there had originally been two guards on duty, and while one had lain in wait for him, the other had gone somewhere below to warn Lavorkis—or Fane—that somebody was forcing an entrance.

At that second Satan's groping hand reached a guard rail, and in the next he had hold of the top of a metal ladder. It was still vibrating very slightly—that second sentinel was still descending.

"I've got to get that fellow before he spreads an alarm," Satan whispered to himself, straining his eyes in a vain attempt to pierce the gloom beneath. He dimly recalled the presence of an antiquated elevator in the tower and wondered why the man on the ladder had not taken it. But of course he was trying to be as noiseless as possible, and elevators creak, don't they? That did not matter, anyway. What did matter was to burn that fellow before he could raise an alarm.

Yet how? Unless his memory played him false—he had been in the place only once before, a long time ago—this shaft led straight down to the bottom floor, and the man on the ladder, besides having a head start, could climb down as fast as Satan could. *Straight* down, though. That was it! Straight down!

SATAN drew his gun and leaned far over the guard rail. Carefully judging his distance from the sides of the well as best he could in the blackness, he pointed the slender barrel of the pistol down the ladder and squeezed the trigger. He felt the jolt of the gun's recoil, and saw the long pencil of angry red hiss downward into emptiness.

Two floors below, the finger of destruction flickered over a black head bobbing from side to side in hurried descent. There came a muffled gasp, ending in choked pain. The dull red beam blinked out.

Satan, still leaning far over the safety-rail, listened intently. From half a dozen floors down came a queer, faint sound. Still the exile held his breath and waited expectantly. At last he straightened up with a fatalistic sigh. From some place many levels beneath had come a thud. Satan smiled wryly. Evidently his visit was destined to remain unannounced by any sentinel.

He wondered once more where Lavorkis—or Fane—was indulging in his villainies; for even yet he had seen no faintest glimmer of light from any of the numerous floors below him. Where could that climbing fellow have been descending to?

After a moment's thought the space brigand decided that there must be a hidden chamber of some sort secreted in the tower, and that the most logical place for such a room would be below the ordinary bottom of the dark, silent structure. He made up his mind to investigate, and turned to examine his unknown assailant before searching for the elevator.

The body on the floor, under Satan's flashlight, proved to be that of a nondescript Earthman, bearded, dirty and ragged. The space pirate sized him up as some nameless denizen of the lower levels, simply hired for this one night's duty. Well, Satan mused ironically, the fellow had certainly earned his pay, even if he wasn't going to be able to collect it.

But Satan's mind swung swiftly back to the gravity of his pressing errand—he could not long forget the fact that his was the madly desperate attempt of a solitary individual to save two unsuspecting worlds from holocaust. An instant more

and he was dropping bottomward in an automatic lift, past floors of scientific wonders unseen in the dark. At no time during the invader's descent was there any sound except that made by the creaking of the elevator itself. When the cage finally came to rest, he stumbled uncertainly into Stygian gloom like a black-robed phantom.

Satan wanted light. He fumbled about the wall until his fingers found a switch and turned it on. Then he saw that he was on the bottom floor of the strangely silent tower and it, like all the rest, seemed deserted. Under the clear light of the neons the exile observed that this part of the structure was more or less of a store-room, with dusty boxes and tanks cluttering up most of its space, except for one spot directly beneath the end of the ladder shaft. Within this spot lay a huddle of lifeless clothing. Satan shuddered slightly.

But where was the entranceway of that secret chamber in which the others must be hidden? The space-black eyes brightened as they discovered footprints and a rectangular patch in the floor which was peculiarly free of the thick dust that overspread all else. Evidently someone had shoved one of the heavy boxes away from that spot not very long ago. The sharp eyes investigated further. Ah, there it was, a barely discernible dark circle within the clean patch on the floor.

Satan would have to step over that bundle of rags, though, if he were to open the disk-like trap-door. But this was no time to be squeamish, with the fate of two worlds hanging in the balance; so the exile quickly strode over the thing on the floor and bent down by the disk, with no more hesitation. It was obviously not only locked, but sealed tightly. Satan jammed his fresh ray-gun into a narrow crevice running around the trap and began slowly to melt the metal beneath. The unseen steel hissed resentfully and cast up tiny sparks as the dull red beam cut through it, but Satan knew that the sound went unheard by those in the chamber below. Noise does not travel easily into a closed place when it has been made airtight.

After about half of the sealed cover had been burned through, Satan was forced to exchange guns again. Mumbling savagely to himself, he shifted position slightly and pressed the release catch on his second pistol. One gun already he had used up, and now this one in his hand was beginning to sputter resentfully; it was the one he had nearly completely discharged on the rooftop.

Now there was but a small arc of locked metal yet to burn, and Satan almost breathed a sigh of relief. Almost—for in that second his remaining ray-gun coughed and went dark. He grunted savagely at the hot weapon in his hand, and thrust it back into its holster. Well, nothing for it but to lose precious minutes and go back to his waiting life-shell for fresh pistols.

Back to the lift he went and shot roofward again. He had almost reached the top level when to his sensitive ears came the unmistakable thrum of hot rocket-exhausts. What in space was up? Surely Waugh wasn't pushing off, leaving him marooned in the midst of his enemies? Or was it——

THE elevator ground to a stop, and Satan was out of it in a split-second and sprinting toward the dim square that was the doorway. He thrust himself out into the moist, salty night air and stopped dead.

There was a lean ether-craft hovering near the roof-edge just behind his own tiny two-man shell. And it bore the distinctive shape of the *Falling Leaf!*

Satan had not even begun to think of

what he ought to do, when he felt the sharp jab of a ray-gun in the small of his back, and a crisp voice remarked delightedly:

"By the Seven Suns! Of all people—Prince Satan, himself! Don't move a whisker or I'll burn you!"

Satan did not have to twist his head around to recognize the speaker as Inspector Nderso Drexx of the universal space-police. "How did you find out I was going to be here tonight?" asked the amazed brigand, as calmly as if he had been expecting this meeting all along.

"I didn't!" Drexx's tones were excited, jubilant. "The Moon Patrol reported a ship without lights, and somewhat similar to the *Space Waif*, slipping down through the air blanket somewhere over Asia—the space-police aren't totally blind, you know. As you are evidently not aware, a billion-dollar shipment of Government script is being convoyed tonight from New Peking, and the boys thought you must be after it. Half the entire police fleet is awaiting your arrival over New Peking at this very moment; but don't you fret your pretty little head about it, because I'll flash them as soon as we get aboard the *Falling Leaf*."

"You should know by this time that mere money has no interest for me. Why should I bother with it? What I need, I simply take. But how did you find out I was here?" Satan's mild voice continued conversationally, while a dozen plans of escape were being submitted, examined, and rejected by his brain.

"Purely accidental," the man in the yellow and scarlet uniform explained chattily. He had good reason to feel expansive with the most wanted man in the universe held at bay at the point of his ray-gun. Prince Satan captured single-handed without a struggle by little Nderso!

"I'm supposed to be on leave this spell," the uniformed officer explained. "Spending a holiday with Tirene—that's my wife—just a couple of miles west of here on Ground Level. One of the neighbors told me that during the past week Lavorkis seemed to be doing strange things in this tower, and that tonight as he was coming home in his helicopter he had noticed a big ship floating at the entrance port.

"Well, since mysterious boats have no business snooping about tidal towers at this hour of the night, I decided to take a little peek, supposing Lavorkis was up to more of his usual dirty work. I got here on the roof just as I heard you come up in the lift. So I hid here to see what went on. But I never dreamed of bagging you!"

Steel-gray eyes, aglow with justifiable elation, glanced triumphantly into fathomless space-black ones. For a brief moment the two men stood in silence, Drexx's white teeth flashing in an even smile; Satan, with a ray-gun digging into his body, absolutely expressionless except for a barely discernible twitching of his disfigured cheek.

"All right, Your Highness," said Inspector Drexx cheerily after an interval, reaching out deftly with his free hand to unfasten Satan's weapon belt and discard it; "let's be moving. It's chilly standing here in the fog. Step right into the *Falling Leaf*, and I'll make it warm enough to suit you. I'm right behind you, so watch your step and don't trip."

Satan remained stoically where he was. The officer repeated his request, emphasizing it this time with a sharp prod of his alert gun. "Go on, Satan. I've got you this time where you can't escape. You're through for good, Prince."

"Drexx," the stern, scarred man exploded suddenly, "listen to me. You've got me, all right. But I won't move a step until you send someone down inside there to find out what's taking place."

"Who's in there?"

In a few words Satan explained his purpose in raiding the tower of Lavorkis. When he had finished, Drexx laughingly shook his head.

"Satan," the big man snorted, "that's pretty thin stuff. High Prince Fane and Lavorkis cooking up a plot against the peace and security of the universe! No, you'll have to think faster than that, Your Highness. Come on, move!"

Satan's ebon eyes blazed through the night mist. "You win, Inspector," he said simply. "But you're not taking me —alive!"

The blond officer tightened his grip on his leveled ray-gun. His own eyes glinted as they met Satan's evenly, and he grated, "Don't try to pull anything, Prince. I've got you and I'm going to keep you. For the last time—get aboard!"

The captive pirate shook his head. "I'm not trying to escape, Drexx," he persisted quietly but resolutely. "It's just that I—that I couldn't bear to stand public trial. I——" The steel hand gestured hopelessly.

A queer light dawned in Inspector Drexx's eyes. "You mean—that you don't want people to find out who you really are? I always thought there was something behind your air of good breed——"

But at that second Satan struck. With a quickness almost impossible to measure, a strong steel arm whipped out, twisted the flesh-and-blood wrist that held the menacing ray-gun. Drexx, his sluggish human fibers too slow to react swiftly enough, was powerless. By the time the inspector had detected the momentary sheen of silver which was the darting metal arm of his opponent, he found himself possessed of a sprained right wrist, and a rod of death was jabbing into his vitals.

Satan's saturnine countenance relaxed in a thin smile. The blond officer gulped and tried to move his numbed fingers. "You see, Inspector," murmured the space pirate, "the hand is still much quicker than the eye. Especially when that hand is animated steel."

"Why, you——" The fearless officer, recovering from his momentary stupefaction and ignoring the gun at his ribs, flung himself at the man with the scar. Once again, however, the machine proved itself superior to the human. In the short time it takes a fist to swing through three short feet of arc, the steel fingers of the man called Satan loosed their grip on the ray-gun, jerked up and back, then rapped soundly against the policeman's jaw.

Drexx's short-arm jab was still on its way toward the mark it never hit, when he was sent crashing to the tower roof by that heavy slap from Satan's mailed palm. The cosmic corsair looked down upon his fallen enemy and shook his head regretfully. He liked this fearless foe of his, and it was with a sense of genuine remorse that he had repaid Drexx's rash courage with a knockout.

Had they met in the old days they would have been fast friends, but now they were forced to be mortal enemies. It was lamentable, but ironic Fate must ever exact its toll.

A hasty glance over his shoulder showed Satan that the crew of the *Falling Leaf* was dutifully below in the ship's engine room, and totally oblivious of what had occurred. That was only natural, since they probably did not even know why their commander had stopped off at the lonely tower.

Inspector Drexx

With feverish haste, mentally bemoaning the precious minutes that were slipping by, Satan bound and gagged the senseless police inspector with strips from the latter's own short-cape after relieving the still form of its broad yellow gun-belt and the customary super-sound radio-whistle. It took but another moment to dump the trussed blond officer inside the tower, safely out of sight of any chance observer from the *Falling Leaf;* and then the exile, armed with one of Drexx's fresh guns, was descending into the depths of the submerged laboratory once more, buckling on his own useless weapon-belt as he went.

TRICKLING perspiration glued the long black bangs tightly against his forehead as Satan, panting from his exertions, knelt down again before the heavy trap-door which cut him off from his prey. When the last inch of sealing metal had been severed by the thin beam of concentrated heat, Satan smiled in somber satisfaction, and easily swung back the stout circular door with his metal hand.

About a yard underneath, Satan found another, smaller door, just as he had anticipated. But this second portal, he noticed with satisfaction as he waved the glowing ray-gun to and fro to cool its dangerously overheated barrel, could only be locked from his side, and its bolts were now drawn from their sockets. Somebody was certainly down in the room below. He hoped with all his heart that it was Fane.

Cautiously Satan slipped his head and shoulders past a yard-thick layer of sound-insulating material, and pressed an ear to the hard metal surface of the trap-door. He thought he heard a scream, faint and muffled, but freighted with agony. Silently, he drew back the steel door a bare inch and peeped into the brilliantly lighted room beneath. . . .

Thorg Lua, a Venusian genius from the domed-in highland city of Seethor but working in the interests of Earth, had perfected a device emitting the strange high-frequency wave which produced artificial death-shock. Because of this discovery, which he had been quite ready to turn over to the proper authorities of the green world, he now found himself strapped helplessly to a long table in a dank and slimy water-lock, with two madmen trying to pry his precious secret from unwilling lips. On a chair beside him lay a copy of his bulky experiment records, which—praise Sirius!—were in an absolutely undecipherable code of his own devising.

Praise Sirius, for Thorg Lua was well aware of the plans of his ambitious captors. Hadn't the Overlord tried to bribe him by the offer of a sum that would have half emptied the treasuries of America? Madmen! Lua had long considered Lavorkis unbalanced—but *Fane!* His Excellency High Prince Fane, Overlord of Earth, himself desirous of plunging his own planet into the hideous maelstrom of a cosmic war! It was preposterous—such a thing could not be!

But unfortunately for Thorg Lua, such a thing was. And here he lay, bound tightly to a table, with two power-mad lunatics attempting to wrest from him his secret. Well, let them torture him. Let them shrivel his flesh—rot it with *chika*-fluid—before his very eyes. Let them sear his soul with drops of that loathsome acid, wither his bared chest with a torment immeasurable. Let them do all this—he wouldn't tell. He wouldn't betray two innocent worlds. He was from Venus, and Venusians knew how to endure pain without flinching. Venusians did not cry out or whimper.

"So you still refuse to be reasonable?" the glaring Fane panted for the twentieth time, while Lavorkis leered from behind

Fane

him. "Very well —Lavorkis, three drops for the next dose."

In one gnarled hand the evil Lavorkis held a half-filled beaker. Into this he now thrust a slender pipette and filled it with the smoking, deadly venom which is brewed in the veins of the Venusian *chika*-plant. With premeditated slowness he bent over the vainly wriggling form on the table.

"Will you tell? Will you tell?" Lavorkis whined, his crooked lips twisting in a snarl.

"Never!"

Lavorkis raised a gaunt hand and carefully squeezed the little bulb he clutched. Three glistening beads of concentrated torture dripped successively from the end of the pipette. Three tiny smudges of oily nastiness formed one by one on the blistered flesh of the abducted man's hairy breast. Three little drops of *chika*—three little black spots of rotting ghastliness, burning on Lua's cruelly peppered chest.

Thorg Lua shut his eyes tightly, and writhed in anguish as molten fire raced through every vein, ate into his very heart. Martyr-like, the furry man bit his lips to hold back a scream of pain. A thread of scarlet trickled from beneath his grinding teeth.

"Will you tell?" prompted Fane, as soon as the writhing body had quieted down. "We've wasted too much time already. We'll have to make the next dose four drops if you won't talk. Then you will faint, and we'll have to revive you before administering another dose. Speak, will you, you poor fool?"

"Never." It was a mere whimper of a sound, but it carried a note of determination.

"Ah, too bad, Lavorkis," lamented Fane. "Give him the four drops."

LAVORKIS leaned forward, the pipette glittering in his trembling fingers. The captive watched it with fear-distended eyes; and just as the black horror in his pupils widened to engulf the green-gold of the irises, so did black horror pulse through his heart. In spite of himself he uttered a wail of almost insane despair. Even a Venusian has his limits of endurance, and Thorg Lua was only human.

"Go on and scream, you stubborn swamp-dog," leered the hawk-nosed Lavorkis. "Why do you think we brought you to this water-lock, when you refused to be sensible? The loudest sound you can make is not a whisper outside this chamber. The silence of the tomb fills the empty tower above us, and the sea around us." Then, savagely, "Nothing can save you, so why don't you tell us what we want to know?"

Thorg Lua's head writhed a piteous negative, while his long sensitive ears drooped listlessly. He made no audible reply, for he could not speak through his fit of coughing. He sobbed feebly and spat blood.

Lavorkis caused another drop of glistening, concentrated evil to fall upon the raw and smoking flesh of his victim.

Thorg Lua was broken. "Stop! Stop!" he screamed hoarsely. "I'll tell! *I'll tell!* Only stop torturing me—and I'll tell you anything! *Only let me alone!*"

Thorg Lua

Lavorkis set down his jar of bubbling acid, and twisted his lanky hands in anticipation. Fane bent forward eagerly.

"All right, tell us. We'll set you free, if you tell us how to produce artificial death-shock," promised Lavorkis, licking his dry lips with nervous greed.

Gaspingly, with ever-increasing effort, the bound prisoner babbled his precious secret while his two listeners hungrily absorbed each word. When Thorg Lua had finished his wheezing explanation, Fane looked questioningly at Lavorkis. The latter nodded assent.

"It sounds quite logical, Excellency."

"Yes—yes. It's truth. . . . All in my books. . . . You can check all—all I have said. I'll give you the key, only—only let—me up. . . ."

"Wait!" interposed Fane, as Lavorkis reached for the strap buckles to release their victim. "Get the key to that cipher *first,* and then we know we're safe. We can't afford to have any slip-up."

Feebly, Thorg Lua choked out the answer to his garbled experiment records. Fane hastily snatched a thick book from its place on the chair, and waveringly decoded a sentence or two of the finely penned pages. He nodded his dark head in silent satisfaction, and the fuel of the Overlord's new-found power kindled the gleam of lust in his eyes till it was a consuming flame.

"Now, you—will let me go?" moaned the injured Venusian man of science, his breath whistling painfully in his nostrils.

"Shall I release him now, Excellency?"

"No, of course not, you idiot," grunted Fane impatiently, busy with Lua's bulky records. "We've got to get rid of him—he'd betray us the moment he got outside. Kill the fool."

Thorg Lua screamed in shrill terror at this heartless treachery on the part of his captors. But heedless of weeping cries for mercy, Lavorkis opened a pouch in his belt and extracted a razor-edge scalpel with eager talons. The Venusian, at sight of the shiny surgical knife approaching his bared and unprotected throat, gave vent to his overwhelming fear in one last shriek which quickly dwindled to a mere husky rattle. In Thorg Lua's torture-twisted body, the spark of life was fast dimming.

"What's wrong?" scowled the sinister high prince, without raising his eyes from the writing over which he labored. "Didn't you hear me? I said to kill him and put an end to that ghastly racket."

Lavorkis stepped close to the wheezing furry man and raised his keen-edged blade to strike. His twisted lips drooled saliva, and a mad frenzy was in his eyes. Dreams of cosmic power so soon to be realized had unhinged his already unstable mind.

The thirsty blade was beginning its slow descent when the trembling frame of Lavorkis was suddenly transfixed as if by a lance of interstellar ice. For a mild voice, whose gentle tones nevertheless held a hint of grim death, was speaking from the ceiling.

"I shouldn't do that if I were you."

"In the name of Dzchan, what's that?" The startled pair of murderous conspirators whirled to glance fearfully toward the trap-door above them, whence the incredible voice had emanated. Stupefied, they stared up into a dark countenance, split diagonally by a long, crooked and hideously livid scar that twitched slightly, as thin lips parted in a warped smile. They stared up into a pair of space-black eyes whose unfathomable depths smoldered with the hot fires of hate. And they looked up into the black, ugly muzzle of a hot-barreled ray-gun.

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The Treader of the Dust

By CLARK ASHTON SMITH

John Sebastian returned to his house, only to experience a ghastly horror

. . . The olden wizards knew him, and named him Quachil Uttaus. Seldom is he revealed: for he dwelleth beyond the outermost circle, in the dark limbo of unsphered time and space. Dreadful is the word that calleth him, though the word be unspoken save in thought: For Quachil Uttaus is the ultimate corruption; and the instant of his coming is like the passage of many ages; and neither flesh nor stone may abide his treading, but all things crumble beneath it atom from atom. And for this, some have called him The Treader of the Dust.

—*The Testaments of Carnamagos.*

IT WAS after interminable debate and argument with himself, after many attempts to exorcise the dim, bodiless legion of his fears, that John Sebastian returned to the house he had left so hurriedly. He had been absent only for three days: but even this was an interruption without precedent in the life of reclusion and study to which he had given himself completely following his inheritance of the old mansion together with a generous income. At no time would he have defined fully the reason of his flight: nevertheless, flight had seemed imperative. There was some horrible urgency that had driven him forth; but now, since he had determined to go back, the urgency was resolved into a matter of nerves overwrought by too close and prolonged application to his books. He had fancied certain things: but the fancies were patently absurd and baseless.

Even if the phenomena that had perturbed him were not all imaginary, there must be some natural solution that had not occurred to his overheated mind at the time. The sudden yellowing of a newly purchased notebook, the crumbling of the sheets at their edges, were no doubt due to a latent imperfection of the paper; and the queer fading of his entries, which, almost overnight, had become faint as age-old writing, was clearly the result of cheap, faulty chemicals in the ink. The aspect of sheer, brittle, worm-hollowed antiquity which had manifested itself in certain articles of furniture, certain portions of the mansion, was no more than the sudden revealing of a covert disintegration that had gone on unnoticed by him in his sedulous application to dark but absorbing researches. And it was this same application, with its unbroken years of toil and confinement, which had brought about his premature aging; so that, looking into the mirror on the morn of his flight, he had been startled and shocked as if by the apparition of a withered mummy. As to the man-servant, Timmers —well, Timmers had been old ever since he could remember. It was only the exaggeration of sick nerves that had lately found in Timmers a decrepitude so extreme that it might fall, without the intermediacy of death, at any moment, into the corruption of the grave.

Indeed, he could explain all that had troubled him without reference to the wild, remote lore, the forgotten demonologies and systems of magic into which he had delved. Those passages in *The Testaments of Carnamagos,* over which he had pondered with weird dismay, were relevant only to the horrors evoked by mad sorcerers in bygone eons. . . .

Sebastian, firm in such convictions, came back at sunset to his house. He did not tremble or falter as he crossed the pine-darkened grounds and ran quickly up the front steps. He fancied, but could not be sure, that there were fresh signs of dilapidation in the steps; and the house itself, as he approached it, had seemed to lean a little aslant, as if from some ruinous settling of the foundations: but this, he told himself, was an illusion wrought by the gathering twilight.

No lamps had been lit, but Sebastian was not unduly surprized by this, for he knew that Timmers, left to his own devices, was prone to dodder about in the gloom like a senescent owl, long after the proper time of lamp-lighting. Sebastian, on the other hand, had always been averse to darkness or even deep shadow; and of late the aversion had increased upon him. Invariably he turned on all the bulbs in the house as soon as the daylight began to fail. Now, muttering his irritation at Timmers' remissness, he pushed open the door and reached hurriedly for the hall switch.

Because, perhaps, of a nervous agitation which he would not own to himself, he fumbled for several moments without finding the knob. The hall was strangely dark, and a glimmering from the ashen sunset, sifted between tall pines into the doorway behind him, was seemingly powerless to penetrate beyond its threshold. He could see nothing; it was as if the night of dead ages had laired in that hallway; and his nostrils, while he stood groping, were assailed by a dry pungency as of ancient dust, an odor as of corpses and coffins long indistinguishable in powdery decay.

At last he found the switch; but the illumination that responded was somehow dim and insufficient, and he seemed to detect a shadowy flickering, as if the circuit were at fault. However, it reassured him to see that the house, to all appearance, was very much as he had left it. Perhaps, unconsciously, he had feared to find the oaken panels crumbling away in riddled rottenness, the carpet falling into moth-eaten tatters; had apprehended the breaking through of rotted boards beneath his tread.

Where, he wondered now, was Timmers? The aged factotum, in spite of his growing senility, had always been quick to appear; and even if he had not heard his master enter, the switching on of the lights would have signalized Sebastian's return to him. But, though Sebastian listened with painful intentness, there was no creaking of the familiar tottery footsteps. Silence hung everywhere like a funereal, unstirred arras.

No doubt, Sebastian thought, there was some commonplace explanation. Timmers had gone to the near-by village, perhaps to restock the larder, or in hope of receiving a letter from his master; and Sebastian had missed him on the way home from the station. Or perhaps the old man had fallen ill and was now lying helpless in his room. Filled with this latter thought, he went straight to Timmers' bedchamber, which was on the ground floor, at the back of the mansion. It was empty, and the bed was neatly made and had obviously not been occupied since the night before. With a suspiration of relief that seemed to lift a horrid incubus from his bosom, he decided that his first conjecture had been correct.

Now, pending the return of Timmers, he nerved himself to another act of inspection, and went forthwith into his study. He would not admit to himself precisely what it was that he had feared to see; but at first glance, the room was

unchanged, and all things were as they had been at the time of his flurried departure. The confused and high-piled litter of manuscripts, volumes, notebooks on his writing-table had seemingly lain untouched by anything but his own hand; and his bookshelves, with their bizarre and terrifical array of authorities on diabolism, necromancy, goety, on all the ridiculed or outlawed sciences, were undisturbed and intact. On the old lectern or reading-stand which he used for his heavier tomes, *The Testaments of Carnamagos,* in its covers of shagreen with hasps of human bone, lay open at the very page which had frightened him so unreasonably with its eldritch intimations.

Then, as he stepped forward between the reading-stand and the table, he perceived for the first time the inexplicable *dustiness* of everything. Dust lay everywhere: a fine gray dust like a powder of dead atoms. It had covered his manuscripts with a deep film, it had settled thickly upon the chairs, the lamp-shades, the volumes; and the rich poppy-like reds and yellows of the oriental rugs were bedimmed by its accumulation. It was as if many desolate years had passed through the chamber since his own departure, and had shaken from their shroud-like garments the dust of all ruined things. The mystery of it chilled Sebastian: for he knew that the room had been clean-swept only three days previous; and Timmers would have dusted the place each morning with meticulous care during his absence.

Now the dust rose up in a light, swirling cloud about him, it filled his nostrils with the same dry odor, as of fantastically ancient dissolution, that had met him in the hall. At the same moment he grew aware of a cold, gusty draft that had somehow entered the room. He thought that one of the windows must have been left open, but a glance assured him that they were shut, with tightly drawn blinds; and the door was closed behind him. The draft was light as the sighing of a phantom, but wherever it passed, the fine, weightless powder soared aloft, filling the air and settling again with utmost slowness. Sebastian felt a weird alarm, as if a wind had blown him from chartless dimensions, or through some hidden rift of ruin; and simultaneously he was seized by a paroxysm of prolonged and violent coughing.

He could not locate the source of the draft. But, as he moved restlessly about, his eye was caught by a low long mound of the gray dust, which had heretofore been hidden from view by the table. It lay beside the chair in which he usually sat while writing. Near the heap was the feather-duster used by Timmers in his daily round of house-cleaning.

It seemed to Sebastian that the rigor of a great, lethal coldness had invaded all his being. He could not stir for several minutes, but stood peering down at the inexplicable mound. In the center of that mound he saw a vague depression, which might have been the mark of a very small footprint half erased by the gusts of air that had evidently taken much of the dust and scattered it about the chamber.

At last the power of motion returned to Sebastian. Without conscious recognition of the impulse that prompted him, he bent forward to pick up the feather-duster. But, even as his fingers touched it, the handle and the feathers crumbled into fine powder which, settling in a low pile, preserved vaguely the outlines of the original object!

A weakness came upon Sebastian, as if the burden of utter age and mortality had gathered crushingly on his shoulders between one instant and the next. There

was a whirling of vertiginous shadows before his eyes in the lamplight, and he felt that he should swoon unless he sat down immediately. He put out his hand to reach the chair beside him—and the chair, at his touch, fell instantly into light, downward-sifting clouds of dust.

AFTERWARD—how long afterward he could not tell—he found himself sitting in the high chair before the lectum on which *The Testaments of Carnamagos* lay open. Dimly he was surprized that the seat had not crumbled beneath him. Upon him, as once before, there was the urgency of swift, sudden flight from that accursed house: but it seemed that he had grown too old, too weary and feeble; and that nothing mattered greatly —not even the grisly doom which he apprehended.

Now, as he sat there in a state half terror, half stupor, his eyes were drawn to the wizard volume before him: the writings of that evil sage and seer, Carnamagos, which had been recovered a thousand years agone from some Græco-Bactrian tomb, and transcribed by an apostate monk in the original Greek, in the blood of an incubus-begotten monster. In that volume were the chronicles of great sorcerers of old, and the histories of demons earthly and ultra-cosmic, and the veritable spells by which the demons could be called up and controlled and dismissed. Sebastian, a profound student of such lore, had long believed that the book was a mere medieval legend; and he had been startled as well as gratified when he found this copy on the shelves of a dealer in old manuscripts and incunabula. It was said that only two copies had ever existed, and that the other had been destroyed by the Spanish Inquisition early in the Thirteenth Century.

The light flickered as if ominous wings had flown across it; and Sebastian's eyes blurred with a gathering rheum as he read again that sinister, fatal passage which had served to provoke shadowy fears:

> Though Quachil Uttaus cometh but rarely, it hath been well attested that his advent is not always in response to the spoken rune and the drawn pentacle. . . . Few wizards, indeed, would call upon a spirit so baleful. . . . But let it be understood that he who readeth to himself, in the silence of his chamber, the formula given hereunder, must incur a grave risk if in his heart there abide openly or hidden the least desire of death and annihilation. For it may be that Quachil Uttaus will come to him, bringing that doom which toucheth the body to eternal dust, and maketh the soul as a vapor for evermore dissolved. And the advent of Quachil Uttaus is foreknowable by certain tokens: for in the person of the evocator, and even perchance in those about him, will appear the signs of sudden age; and his house, and those belongings which he hath touched, will assume the marks of untimely decay and antiquity. . . .

Sebastian did not know that he was mumbling the sentences half aloud as he read them; that he was also mumbling the terrible incantation that followed. . . . His thoughts crawled as if through a chill and freezing medium. With a dull, ghastly certainty, he knew that Timmers had not gone to the village. He should have warned Timmers before leaving; he should have closed and locked *The Testaments of Carnamagos* . . . for Timmers, in his way, was something of a scholar and was not without curiosity concerning the occult studies of his master. Timmers was well able to read the Greek of Carnamagos . . . even that dire and soul-blasting formula to which Quachil Uttaus, demon of ultimate corruption, would respond from the outer void. . . . Too well Sebastian divined the origin of the gray dust, the reason of those mysterious crumblings. . . .

Again he felt the impulse of flight: but his body was a dry dead incubus that refused to obey his volition. Anyway, he reflected, it was too late now; for the

signs of doom had gathered about him and upon him. . . . Yet surely there had never been in his heart the least longing for death and destruction. He had wished only to pursue his delvings into the blacker mysteries that environed the mortal estate. And he had always been cautious, had never cared to meddle with magic circles and evocations of perilous presences. He had known that there were spirits of evil, spirits of wrath, perdition, annihilation: but never, of his own will, should he have summoned any of them from their night-bound abysms. . . .

His lethargy and weakness seemed to increase: it was as if whole lustrums, whole decades of senescence had fallen upon him in the drawing of a breath. The thread of his thoughts was broken at intervals, and he recovered it with difficulty. His memories, even his fears, seemed to totter on the edge of some final forgetfulness. With dulled ears he heard a sound as of timbers breaking and falling somewhere in the house; with dimmed eyes like those of an ancient he saw the lights waver and go out beneath the swooping of a bat-black darkness.

It was as if the night of some crumbling catacomb had closed upon him. He felt at whiles the chill faint breathing of the draft that had troubled him before with its mystery; and again the dust rose up in his nostrils. Then he realized that the room was not wholly dark, for he could discern the dim outlines of the lectern before him. Surely no ray was admitted by the drawn window-blinds: yet somehow there was light. His eyes, lifting with enormous effort, saw for the first time that a rough, irregular gap had appeared in the room's outer wall, high up in the north corner. Through it, a single star shone into the chamber, cold and remote as the eye of a demon glaring across intercosmic gulfs.

Out of that star—or from the spaces beyond it—a beam of livid radiance, wan and deathly, was hurled like a spear upon Sebastian. Broad as a plank, unwavering, immovable, it seemed to transfix his very body and to form a bridge between himself and the worlds of unimagined darkness.

He was as one petrified by the gaze of the Gorgon. Then, through the aperture of ruin, there came something that glided stiffly and rapidly into the room toward him, along the beam. The wall seemed to crumble, the rift widened as it entered.

It was a figure no larger than a young child, but sere and shriveled as some millennial mummy. Its hairless head, its unfeatured face, borne on a neck of skeleton thinness, were lined with a thousand reticulated wrinkles. The body was like that of some monstrous, withered abortion that had never drawn breath. The pipy arms, ending in bony claws, were outthrust as if ankylosed in the posture of an eternal dreadful groping. The legs, with feet like those of a pigmy Death, were drawn tightly together as though confined by the swathings of the tomb; nor was there any movement of striding or pacing. Upright and rigid, the horror floated swiftly down the wan, deathly gray beam toward Sebastian.

Now it was close upon him, its head level with his brow and its feet opposite his bosom. For a fleeting moment he knew that the horror had touched him with its outflung hands, with its starkly floating feet. It seemed to merge within him, to become one with his being. He felt that his veins were choked with dust, that his brain was crumbling cell by cell. Then he was no longer John Sebastian, but a universe of dead stars and worlds that fell eddying into darkness before the tremendous blowing of some ultrastellar wind. . . .

THE thing that immemorial wizards had named Quachil Uttaus was gone; and night and starlight had returned to that ruinous chamber. But nowhere was there any shadow of John Sebastian: only a low mound of dust on the floor beside the lectum, bearing a vague depression like the imprint of a small foot . . . or of two feet that were pressed closely together.

Old Salt

By EDGAR DANIEL KRAMER

All of fifty years I've wandered
  Up an' down the Seven Seas
From the howlin' arctic blizzards
  To the sun-kissed Celebes,
But my heart was ever dreamin',
  As I journeyed east an' west,
Of my turnin' from the waters,
  When I found a port of rest.

Now I'm settled in Snug Harbor,
  Old an' grizzled, with a peg,
That has kept me navigatin'
  Since a shark nipped off my leg;
But, though I have nifty quarters,
  Where I hear the waters roar,
I've discovered that a seaman
  Can't find happiness ashore.

Which explains my bein' grouchy,
  When I should be satisfied,
But I'm achin' to be sailin'
  In the ways I'm now denied,
For I hear the waters callin',
  An' I'm knowin' in my bones
That there ain't no rest for sailors,
  Till they sleep with Davy Jones.

The Idol and the Rajah

By CLAUDE FARRERE

What mystic connection did the Rajah of Saharajonpur have with the six-armed goddess Kali? A strange tale of sudden death

THE Idol which plays a part in this experience of mine (or does it play a part, after all?) is an ivory image which a Singhalese sold me once for thirty rupees, at Mount Lavinia in Ceylon, on the terrace of the famous hotel which serves the best curry on the island. This bit of carved ivory represents a Hindoo matron in a strange squatting position. The lady has six arms with which she is gesticulating vigorously, holding in each hand a severed head which she grasps firmly about the neck. The effect is that of a sort of Tanagra in the Asiatic manner, and it is a little hard on sensitive nerves. I presume you haven't any sympathy with the foolish tales of transmigrations and metempsychoses. In that case my Idol will have only a passing interest for you; and in that case there will be, for you, no particular connection between the image and the adventure which I am moved to tell you about.

The affair dates back a number of years. To be precise, it happened to me on Monday, March 2, 1903, in Salonica, in Macedonia, in a blind alley in the upper Jewish quarter. I should never in the world have published it during the lifetime of Churah Sungh, who shared with me the position of protagonist in the business. But Churah Sungh died back before the Great War, in his capital of Saharajonpur—died without issue. So I see no reason why I should not mention the extraordinary happening if I choose.

You will remember that Churah Sungh was at the time of his death Rajah of Saharajonpur, under the suzerainty of the Emperor of the Indies. But in 1903 he was still only the heir presumptive to the rajahship, and he and I were touring Europe together. We had become acquainted some six years before, in Ceylon—as a matter of fact, it was on the very day when I bought the Idol at Mount Lavinia. I saw him first at lunch. Churah Sungh, distinguished young nabob in elegant traveling-costume with a rainbow-colored turban, was having difficulty in making his wants known to the obsequious and troubled native waiters.

"Rajah Sahib," I said to him in the Urdu speech, "would you like to have an interpreter?"

"You're jolly well right I'd like to have one!" he answered me in faultless English. "I'm a Punjabi, as you see. I can't make anything out of these barbarous Southern lingoes. By Jove, man! you speak all the languages, don't you?"

We were friends from that moment. It was about an hour later that I bought the Idol. And this time it was Churah Sungh's turn to place his information at my service.

"Well now!" he exclaimed when he took a look at my new purchase. "Well now, fancy that! That's my grandmother!"

"Your——?"

"Yes sir, that's who it is, my grandmother! That's Kâli, the Six-Armed Goddess. And we Rajahs of Saharajon-

pur, we are direct lineal descendants of Kâli. But I must admit that we have degenerated."

And he tapped each of his shoulders jocosely with the opposite hand. The prince had two stout, muscular arms, it is true, but only two.

He was the sort of Hindoo prince you meet often nowadays: educated at Sandhurst, an officer in the British army; varnished with English culture from head to foot. But underneath, there was still a Hindoo.

Now for what happened six years later: It was on the evening of March 2, 1903. At about eight o'clock, Churah Sungh and I left our hotel in the Rue Parallèle, in Salonica, to take dinner with the general in command of the International Gendarmerie. (The reader will not have forgotten that in 1903 Salonica still belonged to Turkey.) We had been in Salonica for two days. We had been making a sort of tour of inspection of the District of Mitrovitza. The revolt of the Comitadjis was at its height. They were an ugly bunch, those fellows, and Europeans were a lot of ninnies to be taken in by their crocodile tears. I was writing a series of letters on Balkan conditions for the *London Daily Herald,* and I had had a dozen threatening notes and had even been shot at from behind a hedge. The bullet had missed me by two inches. But I felt it my duty to tell the world what I knew about this business. After the affair of the bullet, I had proposed to Churah Sungh that we separate. I reminded him that it was dangerous to stick around in my neighborhood. But he came back at me indignantly.

"What do you take me for, old fellow? By Jupiter, I believe I'm a man, no matter whatever else I may be or may not be!"

High-minded Britisher in all his ideas and ideals. English to the very tips of his fingers. But underneath, a Hindoo to the marrow of his bones.

We walked along together, to the end of the Rue Parallèle, with its great, flat paving-stones, then up the little streets which climbed the Upper Town, with their unpleasant sharp pebbles. It was darker than a pocket. There were lowering clouds, and street-lighting was unknown. I knew in a general way what direction we were supposed to take. But anybody who knows what a labyrinth the city of Salonica can be when it chooses, will understand how it came about that after half an hour of stumbling through that tangle of alleys in the dark, I realized that I was lost.

"Churah Sungh," I said at last, sheepishly, "I haven't the least idea where we are. I believe the best thing we can do is to climb straight up to those terraces up above us there. Then we can see the whole town."

"Yes, let's get up there as quick as we can. Too bad we'll be late for dinner!"

It was written that we should be even later than we expected at that time. As we stumbled through a dark, twisting little street that was blacker than a mole-hole, somebody hit me a furious blow on the back of the head, and I dropped in my tracks without a whimper. Awhile later I came to my senses and discovered that I was lying on the pavement, on the spot where I had fallen, but that I was tied up like a sausage. When I opened my mouth to cry for help, a big devil of a Bulgarian with a face like some savage beast stuck the point of a knife against my throat. When I felt the sharp, chilly knife-blade touch my flesh, I decided that it would be best to keep quiet.

I was lying on my right side, and my

guard squatted on his heels in front of me. I could see nothing but a ferocious Bulgarian phiz and a big toad-sticker. But I was sufficiently well informed without any enlargement of my landscape. I knew that I had fallen into the hands of the Comitadjis, and I cherished no illusions about my fate. The scoundrels had missed me on the road out in the country, but they had me now, and there was no danger of their letting me go.

Nothing happened for a quarter of an hour. I heard steps approaching, and the light of a lantern was reflected from the blade which still pointed menacingly at my throat. Rough hands seized me and plumped me up against a wall. The first thing that caught my eye was my friend Churah Sungh, trussed up and propped against the wall just as I was. He had dropped into a strange squatting position. I could see that his Hindoo essence had cast off the English envelope, as it always did in crises of elemental emotion. He was crouching with his knees separated and his legs horizontal, in a posture that no one but an Asiatic could ever get himself into—I realized, in a flash of remembrance, that he was in exactly the position that my Idol had taken. . . .

I was not allowed a great deal of time to think my discovery over. Suddenly the man with the lantern flashed it into my face. And another man — there were eight or ten of them altogether—came up and stared at me. This last fellow was a little less dirty than his acolytes, and he seemed more anxious to remain incognito. He wore a neat black mask which left nothing of his face visible but his eyes.

He studied my features for a minute that seemed an eternity. Then he pulled out of his pocket two numbers of the *London Herald,* unfolded them, and laid his finger on my signature.

"You—Harold Furth?" he inquired in broken English.

I did not answer either Yes or No. He sneered. He had the answer to his question in my silence. Another scalawag came up and pointed at Churah Sungh. The leader shrugged his shoulders and pronounced several words which I could not understand, but the gesture which accompanied them was unmistakable. And to make assurance doubly sure, we were formally notified, in English, of the fate that awaited us. The man with the mask stammered, awkwardly but intelligibly:

"The Bulgarian Committee of Salonica has condemned the two of you to death. You will be executed at once."

The point of the dirty fellow's knife still caressed my Adam's apple. There would have been no point in crying out. The houses which surrounded us, black, silent and grated like prisons, gave no promise of aid. I have often heard it said that the imminence of death stimulates the brain to extraordinary activity. It may be so, but I had no such experience at that moment. What I felt, instead, was a stupid and inert sort of resignation. I remember that I had a sensation of extreme chilliness in the small of my back, and that I reasoned vaguely that an Englishman, assassinated in that cowardly fashion, must give his assassins a lesson of courage, by dying disdainfully, with his head in the air. Then I began to think, jerkily, with no particular reason for any of it, of a whole incoherent procession of things and persons: of my father, who had died in his bed as I stood at his bedside, in Brighton —of a poker game I had won a couple of days before—and then, strangely, of the Idol. . . .

Then I felt a sudden obligation, just as a pair of brutal hands were pulling me

down on my knees. It was doubtless a sort of reminiscence of my reading, for that is the way things are done in books. I turned my head toward Churah Sungh:

"Rajah Sahib," I said, "can you forgive me for causing your death like this?"

He did not answer. I looked around at him, carefully. He had not lost consciousness. I could see his eyes, black and white, his Hindoo eyes, which glittered strangely in the darkness. And I could hear that he was chanting some incomprehensible prayer in one of those sacred languages of the North of India which only the priests and the rulers up there understand.

Then, all at once, the butchers seized him. It was evident that they had decided to kill him first. I could see him in the gloom, very distinctly, still crouching, his bust very straight, like the Idol, exactly like the Idol. Two men had taken hold of his shoulders. A third advanced toward him with a knife in his hand. The masked man, who stood looking on, took a step forward to supervise the execution. . . .

Then something mysterious and terrible happened.

The two men who had been holding Churah Sungh let go of him suddenly, and their hands went up to their own throats, as if to pry loose the grip of invisible fingers which were choking them. They tried to cry out, but their voices were hoarse and muffled, and their two cries ended in ghastly noises of gargling and gagging. The man with the mask and the man with the knife, attacked in the same way—or is "attacked" the word for it?—struggled in some mysterious grasp, gasped and writhed in the death agony. It seemed—yes—it seemed as if Churah Sungh had strangled the four wretches with his own hands. And yet all the time I could see distinctly that his hands—his *two* hands—were lashed motionless to his body!

The four grimacing faces stiffened and blackened. The four twisted bodies dropped to the pavement, lifeless heaps of flesh. I saw them fall. I saw four corpses lying before me. Then I remembered that the rest of the band had fled, howling with terror.

And in the unnatural silence which followed, I recall that I heard my own teeth chattering.

It was a night watchman who released us, entirely uninjured, an hour later. As we were friends of the general in command of the International Gendarmerie, there was no investigation. The dead men were four well-known Comitadjis who were on the black books of the police.

Churah Sungh never made a comment on the affair. And the only reason why I am telling it now is that Churah Sungh long ago went to his reward, leaving no descendants, so that the line of the Rajahs of Saharajonpur is extinct, and that consequently there is no longer on earth a child of Kâli, the Six-Armed Goddess.

In Amundsen's Tent*

By JOHN MARTIN LEAHY

"Inside the tent, in a little bag, I left a letter, addressed to H. M. the King, giving information of what he [sic] had accomplished. . . . Besides this letter, I wrote a short epistle to Captain Scott, who, I assumed, would be the first to find the tent."

Captain Amundsen: *The South Pole.*

"We have just arrived at this tent, 2 miles from our camp, therefore about 1½ miles from the pole. In the tent we find a record of five Norwegians having been here, as follows:

Roald Amundsen
Olav Olavson Bjaaland
Hilmer Hanssen
Sverre H. Hassel
Oscar Wisting

16 Dec. 1911.

* * * * *

"Left a note to say I had visited the tent with companions."

Captain Scott: his last journal.

"TRAVELERS," says Richard A. Proctor, "are sometimes said to tell marvelous stories; but it is a noteworthy fact that, in nine cases out of ten, the marvelous stories of travelers have been confirmed."

Certainly no traveler ever set down a more marvelous story than that of Robert Drumgold. This record I am at last giving to the world, with my humble apologies to the spirit of the hapless explorer for withholding it so long. But the truth is that Eastman, Dahlstrom and I thought it the work of a mind deranged; little wonder, forsooth, if his mind had given way, what with the fearful sufferings which he had gone through and the horror of that fate which was closing in upon him.

What was it, that *thing* (if thing it was) which came to him, the sole survivor of the party which had reached the Southern Pole, thrust itself into the tent and, issuing, left but the severed head of Drumgold there?

Our explanation at the time, and until recently, was that Drumgold had been set upon by his dogs and devoured. Why, though, the flesh had not been stripped from the head was to us an utter mystery. But that was only one of many things that were utter mysteries.

But now we know—or feel certain—that this explanation was as far from the truth as that desolate, ice-mantled spot where he met his end is from the smiling, flower-spangled regions of the tropics.

Yes, we thought that the mind of poor Robert Drumgold had given way, that the horror in Amundsen's tent and that thing which came to Drumgold there in his own—we thought all was madness only. Hence our suppression of this part

*From WEIRD TALES for January, 1928.

of the Drumgold manuscript. We feared that the publication of so extraordinary a record might cast a cloud of doubt upon the real achievements of the Sutherland expedition.

But of late our ideas and beliefs have undergone a change that is nothing less than a metamorphosis. This metamorphosis, it is scarcely necessary to say, was due to the startling discoveries made in the region of the Southern Pole by the late Captain Stanley Livingstone, as confirmed and extended by the expedition conducted by Darwin Frontenac. Captain Livingstone, we now learn, kept his real discovery, what with the doubts and derision which met him on his return to the world, a secret from every living soul but two—Darwin Frontenac and Bond McQuestion. It is but now, on the return of Frontenac, that we learn how truly wonderful and amazing were those discoveries made by the ill-starred captain. And yet, despite the success of the Frontenac expedition, it must be admitted that the mystery down there in the Antarctic is enhanced rather than dissipated. Darwin Frontenac and his companions saw much; but we know that there are things and beings down there that they did not see. The Antarctic—or, rather, part of it—has thus suddenly become the most interesting and certainly the most fearful place upon this interesting and fearful globe of ours.

So another marvelous story told—or, rather, only partly told—by a traveler has been confirmed. And here are Eastman and I preparing to go once more to the Antarctic to confirm, as we hope, another story—one eery and fearful as any ever conceived by any romanticist.

And to think that it was ourselves, Eastman, Dahlstrom and I, who made the discovery! Yes, it was we who entered the tent, found there the head of Robert Drumgold and the pages whereon he had scrawled his story of mystery and horror. To think that we stood there, in the very spot where it had been, and thought the story but as the baseless fabric of some madman's vision!

How vividly it all rises before me again—the white expanse, glaring, blinding in the untempered light of the Antarctic sun; the dogs straining in the harness, the cases on the sleds, long and black like coffins; our sudden halt as Eastman fetched up in his tracks, pointed and said, "Hello! What's that?"

A half-mile or so off to the left, some object broke the blinding white of the plains.

"*Nunatak,* I suppose," was my answer.

"Looks to me like a cairn or a tent," Dahlstrom said.

"How on earth," I queried, "could a tent have got down here in 87° 30′ south? We are far from the route of either Amundsen or Scott."

"H'm," said Eastman, shoving his amber-colored glasses up onto his forehead that he might get a better look, "I wonder. Jupiter Ammon, Nels," he added, glancing at Dahlstrom, "I believe that you are right."

"It certainly," Dahlstrom nodded, "looks like a cairn or a tent to me. I don't think it's a *nunatak.*"

"Well," said I, "it would not be difficult to put it to the proof."

"And that, my hearties," exclaimed Eastman, "is just what we'll do! We'll soon see what it is—whether it is a cairn, a tent, or only a *nunatak.*"

The next moment we were in motion, heading straight for that mysterious object there in the midst of the eternal desolation of snow and ice.

"Look there!" Eastman, who was leading the way, suddenly shouted. "See that? It *is* a tent!"

A few moments, and I saw that it was

indeed so. But who had pitched it there? What were we to find within it?

I could never describe those thoughts and feelings which were ours as we approached that spot. The snow lay piled about the tent to a depth of four feet or more. Near by, a splintered ski protruded from the surface—and that was all.

And the stillness! The air, at the moment, was without the slightest movement. No sounds but those made by our movements, and those of the dogs, and our own breathing, broke that awful silence of death.

"Poor devils!" said Eastman at last. "One thing, they certainly pitched their tent well."

The tent was supported by a single pole, set in the middle. To this pole three guy-lines were fastened, one of them as taut as the day its stake had been driven into the surface. But this was not all: a half-dozen lines, or more, were attached to the sides of the tent. There it stood, and had stood for we knew not how long, bidding defiance to the fierce winds of that terrible region.

Dahlstrom and I got each a spade and began to remove the snow. The entrance we found unfastened but completely blocked by a couple of provision-cases (empty) and a piece of canvas.

"How on earth," I exclaimed, "did those things get into that position?"

"The wind," said Dahlstrom. "And, if the entrance had not been blocked, there wouldn't have been any tent here now; the wind would have split and destroyed it long ago."

"H'm," mused Eastman. "The wind did it, Nels—blocked the place like that? I wonder."

The next moment we had cleared the entrance. I thrust my head through the opening. Strangely enough, very little snow had drifted in. The tent was dark green, a circumstance which rendered the light within somewhat weird and ghastly —or perhaps my imagination contributed not a little to that effect.

"What do you see, Bill?" asked Eastman. "What's inside?"

My answer was a cry, and the next instant I had sprung back from the entrance.

"What is it, Bill?" Eastman exclaimed. "Great heaven, what is it, man?"

"A head!" I told him.

"A head?"

"A human head!"

He and Dahlstrom stooped and peered in.

"What is the meaning of this?" Eastman cried. "A severed human head!"

Dahlstrom dashed a mittened hand across his eyes.

"Are we dreaming?" he exclaimed.

"'Tis no dream, Nels," returned our leader. "I wish to heaven it was. A head! A human head!"

"Is there nothing more?" I asked.

"Nothing. No body, not even stripped bone—only that severed head. Could the dogs——"

"Yes?" queried Dahlstrom.

"Could the dogs have done this?"

"Dogs!" Dahlstrom said. "This is not the work of dogs."

We entered and stood looking down upon that grisly remnant of mortality.

"It wasn't dogs," said Dahlstrom.

"Not dogs?" Eastman queried. "What other explanation is there—except cannibalism?"

Cannibalism! A shudder went through my heart. I may as well say at once, however, that our discovery of a good supply of pemmican and biscuit on the sled, at that moment completely hidden by the snow, was to show us that that fearful explanation was not the true one. The dogs! That was it, that was the explanation—even though what the victim himself had set down told us a very different

story. Yes, the explorer had been set upon by his dogs and devoured. But there were things that militated against that theory. Why had the animals left that head—in the frozen eyes (they were blue eyes) and upon the frozen features of which was a look of horror that sends a shudder through my very soul even now? Why, the head did not have even the mark of a single fang, though it appeared to have been *chewed* from the trunk. Dahlstrom, however, was of the opinion that it had been *hacked* off.

And there, in the man's story, in the story of Robert Drumgold, we found another mystery—a mystery as insoluble (if it was true) as the presence here of his severed head. There the story was, scrawled in lead-pencil across the pages of his journal. But what were we to make of a record—the concluding pages of it, that is—so strange and so dreadful?

But enough of this, of what we thought and of what we wondered. The journal itself lies before me, and I now proceed to set down the story of Robert Drumgold in his own words. Not a word, not a comma shall be deleted, inserted or changed.

Let it begin with his entry for January the 3rd, at the end of which day the little party was only fifteen miles (geographical) from the Pole.

Here it is.

JAN. 3.—Lat. of our camp 89° 45′ 10″. Only fifteen miles more, and the Pole is ours—unless Amundsen or Scott has beaten us to it, or both. But it will be ours just the same, even though the glory of discovery is found to be another's. What shall we find there?

All are in fine spirits. Even the dogs seem to know that this is the consummation of some great achievement. And a thing that is a mystery to us is the interest they have shown this day in the region before us. Did we halt, there they were gazing and gazing straight south and sometimes sniffing and sniffing. What does it mean?

Yes, in fine spirits all—dogs as well as we three men. Everything is auspicious. The weather for the last three days has been simply glorious. Not once, in this time, has the temperature been below minus 5. As I write this, the thermometer shows one degree above. The blue of the sky is like that of which painters dream, and, in that blue, tower cloud formations, violet-tinged in the shadows, that are beautiful beyond all description. If it were possible to forget the fact that nothing stands between ourselves and a horrible death save the meager supply of food on the sleds, one could think he was in some fairyland—a glorious fairyland of white and blue and violet.

A fairyland? Why has that thought so often occurred to me? Why have I so often likened this desolate, terrible region to fairyland? Terrible? Yes, to human beings it is terrible—frightful beyond all words. But, though so unutterably terrible to men, it may not be so in reality. After all, are all things, even of this earth of ours, to say nothing of the universe, made for man—this being (a god-like spirit in the body of a quasi-ape) who, set in the midst of wonders, leers and slavers in madness and hate and wallows in the muck of a thousand lusts? May there not be other beings—yes, even on this very earth of ours—more wonderful—yes, and more terrible too—than he?

Heaven knows, more than once, in this desolation of snow and ice, I have seemed to feel their presence in the air about us—nameless entities, disembodied, *watching* things.

Little wonder, forsooth, that I have again and again thought of these strange words of one of America's greatest scientists, Alexander Winchell:

"Nor is incorporated rational existence conditioned on warm blood, nor on any temperature which does not change the forms of matter of which the organism may be composed. There may be intelligences corporealized after some concept not involving the processes of ingestion, assimilation and reproduction. Such bodies would not require daily food and warmth. They might be lost in the abysses of the ocean, or laid up on a stormy cliff through the tempests of an arctic winter, or plunged in a volcano for a hundred years, and yet retain consciousness and thought."

All this Winchell tells us is conceivable, and he adds:

"Bodies are merely the local fitting of intelligence to particular modifications of universal matter and force."

And these entities, nameless things whose presence I seem to feel at times—are they benignant beings or things more fearful than even the madness of the human brain ever has fashioned?

But, then, I must stop this. If Sutherland or Travers were to read what I have set down here, they would think that I was losing my senses or would declare me already insane. And yet, as there is a heaven above us, it seems that I do actually believe that this frightful place knows the presence of beings other than ourselves and our dogs—things which we cannot see but which are watching us.

Enough of this.

Only fifteen miles from the Pole. Now for a sleep and on to our goal in the morning. Morning! There is no morning here, but day unending. The sun now rides as high at midnight as he does at midday. Of course, there is a change in his altitude, but it is so slight as to be imperceptible without an instrument.

But the Pole! Tomorrow the Pole! What will we find there? Only an unbroken expanse of white, or——

JAN. 4.—The mystery and horror of this day—oh, how could I ever set that down? Sometimes, so fearful were those hours through which we have just passed, I even find myself wondering if it wasn't all only a dream. A dream! I would to heaven that it had been but a dream! As for the end—there, there, I must keep such thoughts out of my head.

Got under way at an early hour. Weather more wondrous than ever. Sky an azure that would have sent a painter into ecstasies. Cloud-formations indescribably beautiful and grand. The going, however, was pretty difficult. The place a great plain stretching away with a monotonous uniformity of surface as far as the eye could reach. A plain never trod by human foot before? At length, when our dead reckoning showed that we were drawing near to the Pole, we had the answer to that. Then it was that the keen eyes of Travers detected some object rising above the blinding white of the snow.

On the instant Sutherland had thrust his amber glasses up onto his forehead and had his binoculars to his eyes.

"Cairn!" he exclaimed, and his voice sounded hollow and very strange. "A cairn or a—*tent.* Boys, they have beaten us to the Pole!"

He handed the glasses to Travers and leaned, as though a sudden weariness had settled upon him, against the provision-cases on his sled.

"Forestalled!" said he. "Forestalled!"

I felt very sorry for our brave leader in those, his moments of terrible disappointment, but for the life of me I did not know what to say. And so I said nothing.

At that moment a cloud concealed the sun, and the place where we stood was suddenly involved in a gloom that was deep and awful. So sudden and pronounced, indeed, was the change that we gazed about us with curious and wonder-

ing looks. Far off to the right and to the left, the plain blazed white and blinding. Soon, however, the last gleam of sunshine had vanished from off it. I raised my look up to the heavens. Here and there edges of cloud were touched as though with the light of wrathful golden fire. Even then, however, that light was fading. A few minutes, and the last angry gleam of the sun had vanished. The gloom seemed to deepen about us every moment. A curious haze was concealing the blue expanse of the sky overhead. There was not the slightest movement in the gloomy and weird atmosphere. The silence was heavy, awful, the silence of the abode of utter desolation and of death.

"What on earth are we in for now?" said Travers.

Sutherland moved from his sled and stood gazing about into the eery gloom.

"Queer change, this!" said he. "It would have delighted the heart of Doré."

"It means a blizzard, most likely," I observed. "Hadn't we better make camp before it strikes us? No telling what a blizzard may be like in this awful spot."

"Blizzard?" said Sutherland. "I don't think it means a blizzard, Bob. No telling, though. Mighty queer change, certainly. And how different the place looks now, in this strange gloom! It is surely weird and terrible—that is, it certainly *looks* weird and terrible."

He turned his look to Travers.

"Well, Bill," he asked, "what did you make of it?"

He waved a hand in the direction of that mysterious object the sight of which had so suddenly brought us to a halt. I say in the direction of the object, for the thing itself was no longer to be seen.

"I believe it is a tent," Travers told him.

"Well," said our leader, "we can soon find out what it is—cairn or tent, for one or the other it must certainly be."

The next instant the heavy, awful silence was broken by the sharp crack of his whip.

"Mush on, you poor brutes!" he cried. "On we go to see what is over there. Here we are at the South Pole. Let us see who has beaten us to it."

But the dogs didn't want to go on, which did not surprize me at all, because, for some time now, they had been showing signs of some strange, inexplicable uneasiness. What had got into the creatures, anyway? For a time we puzzled over it; then we *knew*, though the explanation was still an utter mystery to us. They were *afraid*. Afraid? An inadequate word, indeed. It was fear, stark, terrible, that had entered the poor brutes. But whence had come this inexplicable fear? That also we soon knew. The thing they feared, whatever it was, was in that very direction in which we were headed!

A cairn, a tent? What did this thing mean?

"What on earth is the matter with the critters?" exclaimed Travers. "Can it be that——"

"It's for us to find out what it means," said Sutherland.

AGAIN we got in motion. The place was still involved in that strange, weird gloom. The silence was still that awful silence of desolation and of death.

Slowly but steadily we moved forward, urging on the reluctant, fearful animals with our whips.

At last Sutherland, who was leading, cried out that he saw it. He halted, peering forward into the gloom, and we urged our teams up alongside his.

"It must be a tent," he said.

And a tent we found it to be—a small one supported by a single bamboo and well guyed in all directions. Made of

drab-colored gaberdine. To the top of the tent-pole another had been lashed. From this, motionless in the still air, hung the remains of a small Norwegian flag and, underneath it, a pennant with the word "Fram" upon it. Amundsen's tent!

What should we find inside it? And what was the meaning of that—the strange way it bulged out on one side?

The entrance was securely laced. The tent, it was certain, had been here for a year, all through the long Antarctic night; and yet, to our astonishment, but little snow was piled up about it, and most of this was drift. The explanation of this must, I suppose, be that, before the air currents have reached the Pole, almost all the snow has been deposited from them.

For some minutes we just stood there, and many, and some of them dreadful enough, were the thoughts that came and went. Through the long Antarctic night! What strange things this tent could tell us had it been vouchsafed the power of words! But strange things it might tell us, nevertheless. For what was that inside, making the tent bulge out in so unaccountable a manner? I moved forward to feel of it there with my mittened hand, but, for some reason that I cannot explain, of a sudden I drew back. At that instant one of the dogs whined—the sound so strange and the terror of the animal so unmistakable that I shuddered and felt a chill pass through my heart. Others of the dogs began to whine in that mysterious manner, and all shrank back cowering from the tent.

"What does it mean?" said Travers, his voice sunk almost to a whisper. "Look at them. It is as though they are imploring us to—keep away."

"To keep away," echoed Sutherland, his look leaving the dogs and fixing itself once more on the tent.

"Their senses," said Travers, "are

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keener than ours. They already know what we can't know until we see it."

"See it!" Sutherland exclaimed. "I wonder. Boys, what are we going to see when we look into that tent? Poor fellows! They reached the Pole. But did they ever leave it? Are we going to find them in there dead?"

"Dead?" said Travers with a sudden start. "The dogs would never act that way if 'twas only a corpse inside. And, besides, if that theory was true, wouldn't the sleds be here to tell the story? Yet look around. The level uniformity of the place shows that no sled lies buried here."

"That is true," said our leader. "What *can* it mean? What *could* make that tent bulge out like that? Well, here is the mystery before us, and all we have to do is unlace the entrance and look inside to solve it."

He stepped to the entrance, followed by Travers and me, and began to unlace it. At that instant an icy current of air struck the place and the pennant above our heads flapped with a dull and ominous sound. One of the dogs, too, thrust his muzzle skyward, and a deep and long-drawn howl arose. And while the mournful, savage sound yet filled the air, a strange thing happened:

Through a sudden rent in that gloomy curtain of cloud, the sun sent a golden, awful light down upon the spot where we stood. It was but a shaft of light, only three or four hundred feet wide, though miles in length, and there we stood in the very middle of it, the plain on each side involved in that weird gloom, now denser and more eery than ever in contrast to that sword of golden fire which thus so suddenly had been flung down across the snow.

"Queer place this!" said Travers. "Just like a beam lying across a stage in a theater."

Travers' simile was a most apposite one, more so than he perhaps ever dreamed himself. That place was a stage, our light the wrathful fire of the Antarctic sun, ourselves the actors in a scene stranger than any ever beheld in the mimic world.

For some moments, so strange was it all, we stood there looking about us in wonder and perhaps each one of us in not a little secret awe.

"Queer place, all right!" said Sutherland. "But——"

He laughed a hollow, sardonic laugh. Up above, the pennant flapped and flapped again, the sound of it hollow and ghostly. Again rose the long-drawn, mournful, fiercely sad howl of the wolf-dog.

"But," added our leader, "we don't want to be imagining things, you know."

"Of course not," said Travers.

"Of course not," I echoed.

A little space, and the entrance was open and Sutherland had thrust head and shoulders through it.

I don't know how long it was that he stood there like that. Perhaps it was only a few seconds, but to Travers and me it seemed rather long.

"What is it?" Travers exclaimed at last. "What do you see?"

The answer was a scream—the horror of that sound I can never forget—and Sutherland came staggering back and, I believe, would have fallen had we not sprung and caught him.

"What is it?" cried Travers. "In God's name, Sutherland, what did you see?"

Sutherland beat the side of his head with his hand, and his look was wild and horrible.

"What is it?" I exclaimed. "What did you see in there?"

"I can't tell you—I can't! Oh, oh, I wish that I had never seen it! Don't

(Please turn to page 260)

COMING NEXT MONTH

THE telephone on the ebony desk buzzed softly. Keane picked it up.

A harsh voice sounded, speaking in a flat monotone.

"Ascott Keane, you are meddling again!"

The red-haired girl heard the voice as well as Keane. Her soft scream rang out: "Doctor Satan!"

Keane's eyes glittered. He dropped the instrument as if it had turned into a serpent in his fingers.

"I've told you death would strike if you interfered with my plans again," the harsh voice continued, sounding from the floor where the phone lay. "And I always keep my promises——"

The words ended, swiftly and dramatically. With their ending, the telephone on the floor jumped like a live thing, while from transmitter to receiver, in a thick blue arc, crackled a stream of electricity that would have killed a dozen men.

The crackling arc streamed just as far lightning flickered in the skies south of New York, and died as the lightning died.

Keane stared at Beatrice, who had gone white as death.

"He can harness the lightning!" he breathed. "That I cannot do myself! If I can't stop him soon, God knows what will happen to this city—to the whole country——"

He stared at the instrument. The metal was half melted. The hard rubber had been utterly consumed. Then he shrugged and turned toward the screen again, where, dimmed now by the lights in the room but still showing, was the picture of the dying valet, showing motionless with the stoppage of the projector.

"But I *will* stop him!" Keane's voice came bleakly. "Doctor Satan, hear that, wherever you are now." . . .

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(Continued from page 258)

look! Boys, don't look into that tent—unless you are prepared to welcome madness, or worse."

"What gibberish is this?" Travers demanded, gazing at our leader in utter astonishment. "Come, come, man! Buck up. Get a grip on yourself. Let's have an end to this nonsense. Why should the sight of a dead man, or dead men, affect you in this mad fashion?"

"Dead men?" Sutherland laughed, the sound wild, maniacal.

"Dead men? If 'twas only that! Is this the South Pole? Is this the earth, or are we in a nightmare on some other planet?"

"For heaven's sake," cried Travers, "come out of it! What's got into you? Don't let your nerves go like this."

"A dead man?" queried our leader, peering into the face of Travers. "You think I saw a dead man? I wish it was only a dead man. Thank God, you two didn't look!"

On the instant Travers had turned.

"Well," said he, "I am going to look!"

But Sutherland cried out, screamed, sprang after him and tried to drag him back.

"It would mean horror and perhaps madness!" cried Sutherland. "Look at me. Do you want to be like me?"

"No!" Travers returned. "But I am going to see what is in that tent."

He struggled to break free, but Sutherland clung to him in a frenzy of madness.

"Help me, Bob!" Sutherland cried. "Hold him back, or we'll all go insane."

But I did not help him to hold Travers back, for, of course, 'twas my belief that Sutherland himself was insane. Nor did Sutherland hold Travers. With a sudden wrench, Travers was free. The next instant he had thrust head and shoulders through the entrance of the tent.

Sutherland groaned and watched him with eyes full of unutterable horror.

I moved toward the entrance, but Sutherland flung himself at me with such violence that I was sent over into the snow. I sprang to my feet full of anger and amazement.

"What the hell," I cried, "is the matter with you, anyway? Have you gone crazy?"

The answer was a groan, horrible beyond all words of man, but that sound did not come from Sutherland. I turned. Travers was staggering away from the entrance, a hand pressed over his face, sounds that I could never describe breaking from deep in his throat. Sutherland, as the man came staggering up to him, thrust forth an arm and touched Travers lightly on the shoulder. The effect was instantaneous and frightful. Travers sprang aside as though a serpent had struck at him, screamed and screamed yet again.

"There, there!" said Sutherland gently. "I told you not to do it. I tried to make you understand, but—but you thought that I was mad."

"It can't belong to this earth!" moaned Travers.

"No," said Sutherland. "That horror was never born on this planet of ours. And the inhabitants of earth, though they do not know it, can thank God Almighty for that."

"But it is *here!*" Travers exclaimed. "How did it come to this awful place? And where did it come from?"

"Well," consoled Sutherland, "it is dead—it must be dead."

"Dead? How do we know that it is dead? And don't forget this: it didn't come here alone!"

Sutherland started. At that moment the sunlight vanished, and everything was once more involved in gloom.

"What do you mean?" Sutherland asked. "Not alone? How do you know that it did not come alone?"

"Why, it is there *inside* the tent; but the entrance was laced—from the *outside!*"

"Fool, fool that I am!" cried Sutherland a little fiercely. "Why didn't I think of that? Not alone! Of course it was not alone!"

He gazed about into the gloom, and I knew the nameless fear and horror that chilled him to the very heart, for they chilled me to my very own.

Of a sudden arose again that mournful, savage howl of the wolf-dog. We three men started as though 'twas the voice of some ghoul from hell's most dreadful corner.

"Shut up, you brute!" gritted Travers. "Shut up, or I'll brain you!"

Whether it was Travers' threat or not, I do not know; but that howl sank, ceased almost on the instant. Again the silence of desolation and of death lay upon the spot. But above the tent the pennant stirred and rustled, the sound of it, I thought, like the slithering of some repulsive serpent.

"What did you see in there?" I asked them.

"Bob—Bob," said Sutherland, "don't ask us that."

"The thing itself," said I, turning, "can't be any worse than this mystery and nightmare of imagination."

But the two of them threw themselves before me and barred my way.

"No!" said Sutherland firmly. "You must not look into that tent, Bob. You must not see that—that—I don't know what to call it. Trust us; believe us, Bob! 'Tis for your sake that we say that you must not do it. We, Travers and I, can never be the same men again—the brains, the souls of us can never be what they were before we saw *that!*"

"Very well," I acquiesced. "I can't help saying, though, that the whole thing

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seems to me like the dream of a madman."

"That," said Sutherland, "is a small matter indeed. Insane? Believe that it is the dream of a madman. Believe that we are insane. Believe that you are insane yourself. Believe anything you like. Only *don't look!*"

"Very well," I told them. "I won't look. I give in. You two have made a coward of me."

"A coward?" said Sutherland. "Don't talk nonsense, Bob. There are some things that a man should never know; there are some things that a man should never see; that horror there in Amundsen's tent is —both!"

"But you said that it is dead."

Travers groaned. Sutherland laughed a little wildly.

"Trust us," said the latter; "believe us, Bob. 'Tis for your sake, not for our own. For that is too late now. We have seen it, and you have not."

For some minutes we stood there by the tent, in that weird gloom, then turned to leave the cursed spot. I said that undoubtedly Amundsen had left some records inside, that possibly Scott had reached the Pole, and visited the tent, and that we ought to secure any such mementoes. Sutherland and Travers nodded, but each declared that he would not put his head through that entrance again for all the wealth of Ormus and of Ind—or words to that effect. We must, they said, get away from the awful place—get back to the world of men with our fearful message.

"You won't tell me what you saw," I said, "and yet you want to get back so that you can tell it to the world."

"We aren't going to tell the world what we saw," answered Sutherland. "In the first place, we couldn't, and, in the second place, if we could, not a living soul would believe us. But we can warn people, for that thing in there did not come alone. Where is the other one—or the others?"

"Dead, too, let us hope!" I exclaimed.

"Amen!" said Sutherland. "But maybe, as Bill says, it isn't dead. Probably——"

Sutherland paused, and a wild, indescribable look came into his eyes.

"Maybe it—*can't die!*"

"Probably," said I nonchalantly, yet with secret disgust and with poignant sorrow.

What was the use? What good would it do to try to reason with a couple of madmen? Yes, we must get away from this spot, or they would have me insane, too. And the long road back? Could we ever make it now? And what *had* they seen? What unimaginable horror was there behind that thin wall of gabardine? Well, whatever it was, it was real. Of that I could not entertain the slightest doubt. Real? Real enough to wreck, virtually instantaneously, the strong brains of two strong men. But—were my poor companions really mad, after all?

"Or maybe," Sutherland was saying, "the other one, or the others, went back to Venus or Mars or Sirius or Algol, or hell itself, or wherever they came from, to get more of their kind. If that is so, heaven have pity on poor humanity! And, if it or they are still here on this earth, then sooner or later—it may be a dozen years, it may be a century—but sooner or later the world will know it, know it to its wo and to its horror. For they, if living, or if gone for others, will come again."

"I was thinking——" began Travers, his eyes fixed on the tent.

"Yes?" Sutherland queried.

"——that," Travers told him, "it might be a good plan to empty the rifle into that thing. Maybe it isn't dead; may-

be it can't die—maybe it only *changes*. Probably it is just hibernating, so to speak."

"If so," I laughed, "it will probably hibernate till doomsday."

But neither one of my companions laughed.

"Or," said Travers, "it may be a demon, a ghost materialized. I can't say incarnated."

"A ghost materialized!" I exclaimed. "Well, may not every man or woman be just that? Heaven knows, many a one acts like a demon or a fiend incarnate."

"They may be," nodded Sutherland. "But that hypothesis doesn't help us any here."

"It may help things some," said Travers, starting toward his sled.

A moment or two, and he had got out the rifle.

"I thought," said he, "that nothing could ever take me back to that entrance. But the hope that I may——"

Sutherland groaned.

"It isn't earthly, Bill," he said hoarsely. "It's a nightmare. I think we had better go now."

Travers was going—straight toward the tent.

"Come back, Bill!" groaned Sutherland. "Come back! Let us go while we can."

But Travers did not come back. Slowly he moved forward, rifle thrust out before him, finger on the trigger. He reached the tent, hesitated a moment, then thrust the rifle-barrel through. As fast as he could work trigger and lever, he emptied the weapon into the tent—into that horror inside it.

He whirled and came back as though in fear the tent was about to spew forth behind him all the legions of foulest hell.

What was that? The blood seemed to freeze in my veins and heart as there arose from out the tent a sound—a sound

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low and throbbing—a sound that no man ever had heard on this earth—one that I hope no man will ever hear again.

A panic, a madness seized upon us, upon men and dogs alike, and away we fled from that cursed place.

The sound ceased. But again we heard it. It was more fearful, more unearthly, soul-maddening, hellish than before.

"Look!" cried Sutherland. "Oh, my God, *look at that!*"

The tent was barely visible now. A moment or two, and the curtain of gloom would conceal it. At first I could not imagine what had made Sutherland cry out like that. Then I saw it, in that very moment before the gloom hid it from view. The tent was moving! It swayed, jerked like some shapeless monster in the throes of death, like some nameless thing seen in the horror of nightmare or limned on the brain of utter madness itself.

And that is what happened there; that is what we saw. I have set it down at some length and to the best of my ability under the truly awful circumstances in which I am placed. In these hastily scrawled pages is recorded an experience that, I believe, is not surpassed by the wildest to be found in the pages of the most imaginative romanticist. Whether the record is destined ever to reach the world, ever to be scanned by the eye of another—only the future can answer that.

I will try to hope for the best. I cannot blink the fact, however, that things are pretty bad for us. It is not only this sinister, nameless mystery from which we are fleeing—though heaven knows that is horrible enough—but it is the *minds* of my companions. And, added to that, is the fear for my own. But there, I must get myself in hand. After all, as Sutherland said, I didn't see it. I must not give way. We must somehow get our story to the world, though we may have for our reward only the mockery of the world's unbelief, its scoffing—the world, against which is now moving, gathering, a menace more dreadful than any that ever moved in the fevered brain of any prophet of wo and blood and disaster.

We are a dozen miles or so from the Pole now. In that mad dash away from that tent of horror, we lost our bearings and for a time, I fear, went panicky. The strange, eery gloom denser than ever. Then came a fall of fine snow-crystals, which rendered things worse than ever. Just when about to give up in despair, chanced upon one of our beacons. This gave us our bearings, and we pressed on to this spot.

Travers has just thrust his head into the tent to tell us that he is sure he saw something moving off in the gloom. Something moving! This must be looked into.

[If Robert Drumgold could only have left as full a record of those days which followed as he had of that fearful 4th of January! No man can ever know what the three explorers went through in their struggle to escape that doom from which there was no escape—a doom the mystery and horror of which perhaps surpass in gruesomeness what the most dreadful Gothic imagination ever conceived in its utterest abandonment to delirium and madness.]

Jan. 5.—Travers *had* seen something, for we, the three of us, saw it again today. Was it that horror, that thing not of this earth, which they saw in Amundsen's tent? We don't know what it is. All we know is that it is something that moves. God have pity on us all—and on every man and woman and child on this earth of ours if this thing is what we fear!

6th.—Made 25 mi. today—20 yesterday. Did not see it today. *But heard it.*

Seemed near—once, in fact, as though right over our heads. But that must have been imagination. Effect on dogs most terrible. Poor brutes! It is as horrible to them as it is to us. Sometimes I think even more. Why is it following us?

7th.—Two of dogs gone this morning. One or another of us on guard all "night". Nothing seen, not a sound heard, yet the animals have vanished. Did they desert us? We say that is what happened but each man of us knows that none of us believes it. Made 18 mi. Fear that Travers is going mad.

8th.—Travers gone! He took the watch last night at 12, relieving Sutherland. That was the last seen of Travers—the last that we shall ever see. No tracks—not a sign in the snow. Travers, poor Travers, gone! Who will be the next?

Jan. 9.—Saw it again! Why does it let us see it like this—sometimes? Is it that horror in Amundsen's tent? Sutherland declares that it is not—that it is something even more hellish. But then S. is mad now—mad—mad—mad. If I wasn't sane, I could think that it all was only imagination. *But I saw it!*

Jan. 11.—Think it is the 11th but not sure. I can no longer be sure of anything—save that I am alone and that it is watching me. Don't know how I know, for I cannot see it. But I do know—it is watching me. It is always watching. And sometime it will come and get me—as it got Travers and Sutherland and half of the dogs.

Yes, today must be the 11th. For it was yesterday—surely it was only yesterday—that it took Sutherland. I didn't see it take him, for a fog had come up, and Sutherland—he would go on in the fog—was so slow in following that the vapor hid him from view. At last when he didn't come, I went back. But S. was gone—man, dogs, sled, everything was gone. Poor Sutherland! But then he was

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mad. Probably that was why it took him. Has it spared me because I am yet sane? S. had the rifle. Always he clung to that rifle—as though a bullet could save him from what we saw! My only weapon is an ax. But what good is an ax?

Jan. 13.—Maybe it is the 14th. I don't know. What does it matter? Saw it *three* times today. Each time it was closer. Dogs still whining about tent. There—that horrible hellish sound again. Dogs still now. That sound again. But I dare not look out. The ax.

Hours later. Can't write any more.

Silence. Voices—I seem to hear voices. But that sound again.

Coming nearer. At entrance now—now——

WE AWAIT with eager interest your verdict on the stories about Doctor Satan, the first of which is published in this issue; for it is you, the readers, who determine the editorial policy of this magazine. To those of you who are afraid that WEIRD TALES will degenerate into just another detective magazine, we definitely promise that it will not do so. The admission to our pages of occasional detective stories (heretofore taboo in WEIRD TALES) does not mean that we are going to specialize in detective stories, for we are not. Detective stories, to win acceptance in the pages of this magazine, must be intrinsically weird tales. If the stories about Doctor Satan and Ascott Keane—the world's weirdest criminal and the strangest criminologist—are ordinary detective stories, then we do not know a weird story when we see one. We have just read the manuscript of the third story in the series, in which Doctor Satan perpetrates a ghastly horror in the movie colony in Hollywood; and we can scarcely contain our enthusiasm for that story. But we want *your* reactions to the stories about Doctor Satan and Ascott Keane. Write and let us know what you think of them.

The Horror in the Studio

Donald Allgeier, of Mountain Grove, Missouri, writes: "Although I have read only half the June issue so far, I am too enthusiastic over *The Horror in the Studio* to delay writing. Without reading the other stories, I am sure it will be the best in the issue. It shows the hand of a master. I think I have read stories by Miss Quick before, but nothing to compare with this one. She should become as great a writer as C. L. Moore, though in a different type of stories. The story mentioned gripped me exceedingly. Its atmosphere was perfect. In short, it was excellent *plus*. Among the stories I have read so far in the June issue, Howard's *Beyond the Black River* is second best. Keep coming, Conan. The short stories are good, but Bloch's latest is again a little too wordy and pretentious. I see you have some new cuts at the bottom of your pages. They are well done and add to your magazine's appearance. . . . In conclusion, let me request more stories about de

Grandin, and soon. And I'd like to see Northwest Smith in a serial."

Aerie, Aery, Eyrie, Eyry

J. L. S., of Seattle, writes to the Eyrie: "We want you to settle a bet for us as to the proper way to pronounce *Eyrie*. Several of us had a discussion last night about it. Just what is the proper pronunciation of the word?" [Did you consult a dictionary? We cannot decide your bet for you. The dictionaries list several different spellings of this word, and several different pronunciations, all of them correct. In the editorial rooms of WEIRD TALES we pronounce the word to rime with *dairy* (*ey* as in *they*), but this is merely *our* way of pronouncing it, and does not give us the authority to decide a bet.—THE EDITOR.]

The Woman in Gray

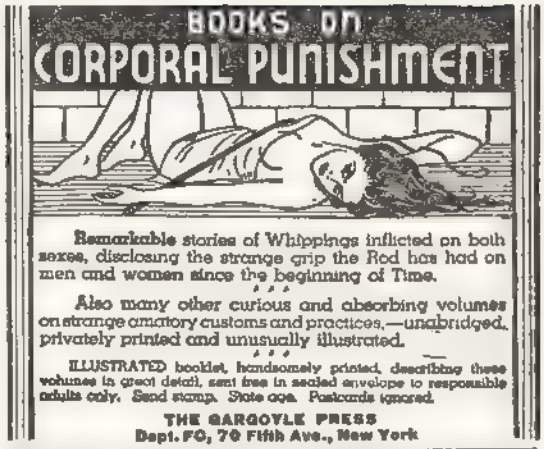
Henry Kuttner, of Hollywood, writes: "I've just read *The Woman in Gray* in your June issue, and it's unequivocally the best story in that issue—and for a long time. And it helps to prove my pet theory—that true weirdness lies in subtle suggestion rather than in bald description. Suppose Walker Everett had switched to the viewpoints of the victims, and allowed the reader to *see* the Gray Woman in each tragedy? Obviously the effect would have been lost, and the tremendously effective ending would have been ruined. There's no bald description in the climax, either—just a statement that the Woman came in, 'quietly, delicately'."

Postcard Brickbat

J. A. Williams, of Oklahoma City, writes: "WEIRD TALES for the past nine years are in my possession. They represent a great and magnificent work. But when it comes to a Craig Kennedy murder mystery illustrated on the cover of your May issue, I am completely disgusted. The covers for March and June are bad enough without printing a trite detective story in our magazine. Give us more authors like H. P. Lovecraft, C. L. Moore, Clark Ashton Smith and Seabury Quinn."

Outburst

Louis C. Smith, of Oakland, California, writes: "This outburst at last—I've grown so tired of seeing silly arguments and bickering take up the space in the Eyrie which



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should be devoted to constructive criticism, comment and suggestions on the work of the authors writing for WT. Fans of any type are 'ornery' animals, no two of them alike in ideas, opinions or preferences. Witness the endless argument and in many cases silly haggling which continually goes on in the discussion columns of not only WEIRD TALES but of all fantasy magazines; and in WT itself there has since the beginning been ever a mad fanfare and blowing of indignant trumpets over this, that, and the other inconsequential item. Believe it or not, a terrific battle once waged in the Eyrie over the question of whether the magazine should or should not continue to print weird stories. Some even said that all tales even faintly suggestive of gruesomeness should be eliminated. Idiotic people, these fantastiacs! Edmond Hamilton's yarns of thundering spheres and cosmic cataclysmic catastrophes (oh boy!) have come in for their share of constant belittlement. More than a few have complained that serials were totally unnecessary to the magazine's existence. Probably the most lustily contested of all the verbal battles has been the one over Mrs. Brundage's exquisite maidens who adorn the WT covers bedecked in naught but the modest flimsiness of lacy nothings and their blushing virginity—and sometimes obviously not that. But it occurs to me that all this flinging of poison pen and haughty satirical denouncement of another's beliefs is not so important after all. Quite obviously the majority of strongly prejudiced letters one finds in the discussion columns are written by extremists. Only the fact that the ideas contained in them *are* extreme causes them to be printed. The balanced mind is the average fantasy fan who accepts the many good things which come his way and does not bother to pull down the moon over every tiny mistake or case of poor judgment. I think most of us hope to be this latter type of person. So take heart, editor—your defenders are legion. WT continues to satisfy, only more so. I'll say, however, that I frankly did not like A. W. Bernal's yarn, *The Man Who Was Two Men.* I agree that it was the most original and entertaining yarn about radio ever written: but so were the other stories from which it evolved. However, I do like Bernal's work, and if the closing chapters of *Satan in Exile* are as intensely exciting and dramatically good as the first installment, here is my vote to make it Number One interplanetary tale for the year 1935, and maybe a few other years. It has everything. For a young man, Bernal has come to the fore in the ranks of fantasy writers, and come with a bang. Dorothy Quick's story was both entertaining and original; and Brundage's cover illustration only added to its excellence. I give it second place in the June issue. Enough."

Conan as King

John Malone, of Jackson, Mississippi, writes: "In the last installment of *Beyond the Black River,* Conan said, in his conversation with Balthus, that he had never been a king. Is this correct? No. Mr. Howard's memory must be short, for I remember the first Conan story, *The Phoenix on the Sword.* In that, Conan was a king—the king of Aquilonia. Also, in *The Scarlet Citadel* he was a king—of Aquilonia. That flaw didn't ruin the story, though—it did not even mar it; but Howard should be more careful." [Mr. Howard has not lost his memory as to Conan's kingship. In one of the stories about this strange barbarian adventurer, Conan remarked that he had been king more than once, in several lands. In another story he said that he might be a king himself some day, as stranger things than that had happened to him. In the first Conan stories, he was already a king. But these stories deal with a later period in Conan's career than do the later stories. Conan will be a king again in *The Hour of the Dragon,* which we will publish soon.—THE EDITOR.]

C. L. Moore's Stories

Jerry Laird, of Topeka, Kansas, writes: "I find your magazine highly entertaining, especially those masterpieces of fantasy by C. L. Moore. His inimitable style and word pictures, combined with an unbounded imagination, certainly put him in a class with Merritt and Lovecraft. *Julhi,* in my opinion, surpassed anything else he has written, with the exception, perhaps, of *Shambleau.*"

Keep Weird Tales Weird

Elaine McIntire, of Malden, Massachusetts, writes: "For heaven's sake, keep WEIRD TALES weird!!! Keep those third-class detectives out!!!! WEIRD TALES is the only magazine of its kind. Keep it shivery. That story, *The Man Who Was Two Men,* was

funny; in fact I chuckled out loud (very odd for me), but after all I can read *that* type in any radio magazine. Now take Hazel Heald's *Out of the Eons*, also Dorothy Quick's *The Horror in the Studio*—they really make me shiver (and I am a very hard one to shiver, even if I was alone at midnight in a graveyard reading WT). *Out of the Eons* made me 'sit up and take notice' of the Widener Library, which I have noticed more than once in my visits to Boston. The characters I have a fondness for are Jules de Grandin, Conan, and Northwest Smith. Now a word about Mrs. Brundage's covers. They couldn't be surpassed. I have no objections to the covers: let them be nude one month and weird the next, I don't care. Her nudes are drawn with such exquisite taste and such blending of colors that they are beautiful and do not seem a bit sexy. As I said before and I say it again: Keep WEIRD TALES weird with more vampire stories and more like *Out of the Eons*."

Steady Improvement

Donald Wilson, of St. Louis, writes: "This is my first letter to WEIRD TALES, which I have read for several years. It has steadily improved during that time. Most of the stories are good, and some are excellent. Quinn's character of Jules de Grandin is a favorite of mine. Can't we have more of the dapper Frenchman? Clark Ashton Smith uses an extensive vocabulary superbly. I like the trimmed edges of the magazine. The hero doesn't hang in midair as I turn the page. . . . Arlton Eadie's death is a distinct loss. His *Trail of the Cloven Hoof* is your best serial to date. Yours for continued weirdness."

$1.10 a Copy

Veith Dall writes from Mexico City: "Don't alter the style of WT. It was perfect. But good old Weird is going to the doggies with silly detective stories. *The Death Cry* is entirely unbelievable and far-fetched. . . . The latest cover design is neither weird nor beautiful—nor fantastic either. I prefer the girls you had before. As long as I am picking, I might as well get it all off my mind at once. I don't care for interplanetary stories nor those like *Yellow Doom*—too much alike. Let me say enthusiastically that the reprint, *Arthur Jermyn*, was marvelous, as were also *The Bronze Casket* and *Mug-*

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gridge's Aunt. WEIRD TALES is the only magazine I consider worth buying of the type, and here in Mexico it is worth $1.10 each copy."

An Admirer of Lovecraft

Emil Petaja, of Milltown, Montana, writes: "I have just completed reading two issues—the latest issues of WT, and should like to express my opinions on them. One notices so many readers in the Eyrie saying 'WT is not what it used to be,' etc., etc.; and I wonder if these readers realize that perhaps a great deal of this change is in themselves, rather than in the magazine. But I do agree with Mr. Paul Brown, in the April issue, who suggests a return of the clever little pictures used formerly on the title and table of contents page—and of the use of less mechanically bold and distinct illustrations. As to the authors: Clark Ashton Smith remains as ever—the poet of dreams whose tales waft one into far-off enchanted lands; Robert E. Howard is excellent—but why doesn't he write some more stories like *The Black Stone?* Searight's poetry is fascinating. Howard Wandrei is fine, too. But why on earth (or in the universe, for that matter) don't you get some new tales by the Prince of Fantasy—that great classic weird writer who will never be equaled—H. P. Lovecraft? When I recall *The Strange High House in the Mist* and *The Outsider,* I can't help wishing I could recall some of the great thrills I felt in first perusing these masterpieces. But I'm sure *anything* Lovecraft wrote would be wonderful—and most welcome! Why not try to get him to write a long story—something forceful and colossal and magnificent; bringing to life eon-dead civilizations brought to earth from the outside—with its setting perhaps—say in the Antarctic?"

Dare and Double-Dare

Carl E. Woolard, of Flint, Michigan, writes: "The inspiration for this letter was furnished by that lovely piece of verse in the May issue, *Tea-Drinking.* That poem alone was worth the price of the magazine, not even mentioning the other good things therein contained. The finest story in that issue was Clark Ashton Smith's gem, *The Flower-Women.* Mr. Smith's stories please me as those of no other WT author can. By the way, in the Eyrie this month I see a paragraph by Mr. M. E. Thomas, of Indianapolis, which says: 'Smith is grand, too, if he'd only get over the idea he's an artist.' Well, Mr. Thomas, Mr. Smith is an artist—with words. I dare you, Mr. Thomas, to write a piece of description as lovely as Mr. Smith has in every one of his stories. Yes, I dare you! In the same issue, Mr. Carl A. Butz, of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, Butz in with the statement that he doubts if anyone over the mental age of twelve years reads interplanetary stories. Have you any authority to back that statement, Mr. Butz? I doubt it. Some of the most active WT fans are also science-fiction fans. . . . Mr. Editor, *please* stop referring to Jack Darrow of Chicago as '*good* old Jack Darrow.' In the May Eyrie I saw the second recent example of this. Thank heaven for some nude-less covers!"

Suggested Reprints

Robert Tufts, of White Plains, New York, writes: "I want to add my plea to those that you've already received urging that you reprint H. P. Lovecraft's masterpiece, *The Picture in the House.* This, to my mind, is one of the outstanding pieces of weird literature of all time. Another story I think would make a good reprint is *In Amundsen's Tent* by John Martin Leahy. Concerning the May issue, my choice for first place is *Arthur Jermyn* by Lovecraft. This was followed by *The Death Cry* and *The Flower-Women* in the order named. I've just succeeded in getting the point to the pen name of the brothers Binder: i. e., Eando. Earl and Otto Binder—E. and O. Binder—Eando Binder. It seems that you've uncovered a real prodigy in young Mr. Bloch of Milwaukee. *The Feast in the Abbey* was a fine tale, written in a powerful style. I can't say so much for *The Secret in the Tomb,* though. It seemed to me he strove too hard for a weird effect. Yours for more Lovecraft."

Fears for Our Future

J. Wasso, Jr., of Pen Argyl, Pennsylvania, writes: "My previous letters on the subject of the Brundage cover nudes were disregarded; therefore I'll discuss the matter from a different angle. I won't condemn the recent undistinguished *ordinary* covers just because they supplant the exquisite Brundage pastels, but I do think that, unless these cheap detective covers are discontinued, they will in time alter the editorial policy of WEIRD

TALES to such an extent that this unique publication will deteriorate into just another 'dime-a-dozen' weird-scientific-detective magazine, possessing no distinction, no personality whatever. Sincere supporters of WEIRD TALES view such a possibility with genuine alarm. We can take no chances with our WEIRD TALES—other magazines may come and go, but WEIRD TALES must go on for ever." [Cheer up, Mr. Wasso—next month's cover will contain an exquisite nude, drawn in pastel crayons by Mrs. Brundage in her most captivating style.—THE EDITOR.]

Short Comments

G. Mumford, of Plainfield, New Jersey, writes: "*The Horror in the Studio* is the best story of its kind I have ever read. I think Dorothy Quick is a great addition to your magazine."

William Chandos, of Hollywood, California, writes: "A few of your short stories are really gems. For true nightmare weirdness, Everett's *The Woman in Gray* in the last issue is immense. *In the Triangle,* by Howard Wandrei, was mighty good."

Mickey McTavish, of Chicago, writes: "Being a constant reader of WT with 'furor scribendi,' I am of the opinion that your covers of April and May were 'ad nauseam' to say the least. Please let that 'artium magister' M. Brundage draw your cover illustrations in her *former* style."

A. K. Ulber, of Brooklyn, writes: "As far as the covers go, the only one I object to is that of the April issue—it was horrible. Tell Mrs. Brundage to keep her girls on the cover."

Joseph Robinsky, Jr., of Elizabeth, New Jersey, writes: "If you must have detective stories, please give us Jules de Grandin tales; these are at least weird and strange and give credibility to the supernatural and occult."

Julius Hopkins, of Washington, D. C., writes: "In the June issue there is only one story I deem capable of measuring up to WT's high standard and that story is *Flapping Wings of Death* by Amelia Reynolds Long. This tale holds its weird and uncanny atmosphere throughout."

Ruin?

Dolores F. Anaya, of San Diego, California, writes: "This is in protest. Why are you bent on ruining a wonderful magazine?

NEXT MONTH

THE CARNIVAL OF DEATH

By Arlton Eadie

THE English author, Arlton Eadie, whose untimely death last March was a distinct loss to lovers of mystery fiction on both sides of the Atlantic, completed a weird mystery novel shortly before his death—a novel packed full of eery intrigue, mysterious happenings, and the ghostly antics of a strange Egyptian and a Golden Mummy that stalked through the night—a novel that tells in vivid words the story of an orgy of death that struck its victims hideously, in the darkness of the night.

THIS thrilling weird novel, the last to flow from Mr. Eadie's pen, will now be published posthumously in this magazine. It will begin

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WEIRD TALES

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Who in Sam Hill wants to read Reeves looking for eery thrills? He belongs to the murder-mystery magazines, certainly not in a magazine of the originality and high quality of WEIRD TALES. . . . Where is little Jules de Grandin? Where is Northwest Smith? From WT we want stories that make our hair rise, vampires, werewolves, creatures part plant and part witch, and such. One story was as sleep-producing as another. . . . I've read the magazine for eleven years, but if this May issue is what you are degenerating a fine old magazine into, I'm going to quit. For gosh sakes, snap out of your hop! Murder-mysteries, interplanetary and scientific stories are *not* weird, but they are *very boring.*"

Best He Has Ever Read

Lathan Frayser, of Brazil, Indiana, writes: "May I say that your magazine is the best that I have ever read? *Flapping Wings of Death* by Amelia Reynolds Long was my favorite story in the June issue, and also the reprint of *The Cup of Blood* by Otis Adelbert Kline. I shall always be a customer of your magazine. Keep the covers weird."

William Wilson

James J. O'Donnell, of New York City, writes: "I have noticed stories by Edgar Allan Poe in your Weird Story Reprint section from time to time, but so far you have failed to reprint his topnotch best story, *William Wilson.* I am aware that Poe himself considered his best story to be *Ligeia,* which you have already reprinted; but James Russell Lowell considered *William Wilson* to be Poe's highest achievement in prose. An author is usually a poor judge of the relative merits of his own brain-children, and I think that in this instance Lowell's judgment was better than Poe's. *William Wilson* is a great psychological study of the progressive degeneration of a human soul, and that great master of the weird story has written nothing finer. I wish you would reprint it. And while I am about it, let me urge again that you reprint the first of the Jules de Grandin stories, *The Horror on the Links,* which appeared in WEIRD TALES 'way back when. Those who have not read this story before will thus be given a literary treat; and those of us who have already read the story will be glad to read it again. Selah."

Most Popular Story

Readers, what is your favorite story in this issue? And if there are any stories you do not like, we want to know which ones, and why you dislike them. Write a letter to the Eyrie, WEIRD TALES, or fill out the coupon on this page and send it to us. Your favorite story in the June issue, as shown by your votes and letters, was Dorothy Quick's strange story of Hollywood, *The Horror in the Studio.* This story was closely pressed for first place by Walker G. Everett's short short, *The Woman in Gray.*

MY FAVORITE STORIES IN THE AUGUST WEIRD TALES ARE:

Story	Remarks
(1) ----------	----------
(2) ----------	----------
(3) ----------	----------

I do not like the following stories:

(1) ---------- Why? ----------

(2) ---------- ----------

It will help us to know what kind of stories you want in WEIRD TALES if you will fill out this coupon and mail it to The Eyrie, Weird Tales, 840 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Reader's name and address:

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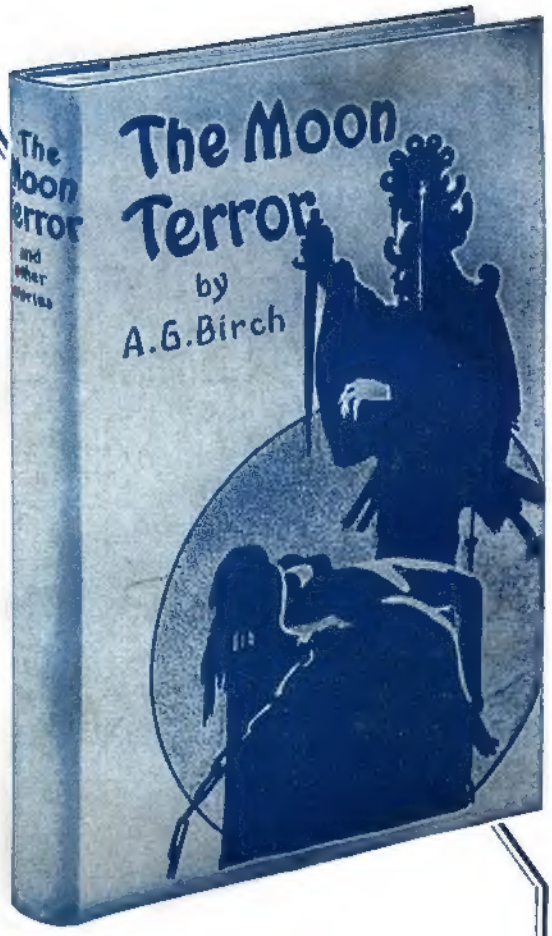
THE first warning of the stupendous cataclysm that befell the earth in the fourth decade of the Twentieth Century was recorded simultaneously in several parts of America. At twelve minutes past 3 o'clock a. m., during a lull in the night's aerial business, several of the larger stations of the Western hemisphere began picking up strange signals out of the ether. They were faint and ghostly, as if coming from a vast distance. As far as anyone could learn, the signals originated nowhere upon the earth. *It was as if some phantom were whispering through the ether in the language of another planet.*



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WE HAVE had many requests asking us to reprint THE MOON TERROR in the magazine. This popular story appeared as a serial in WEIRD TALES in 1923, and is too long to republish in the magazine consistent with our policy. To fulfill the wishes of many readers who have not had the opportunity to read this story, we have had it printed in book form and offer a copy free with each six months' subscription to WEIRD TALES.

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